

Div. Lib.

# SHALL WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE



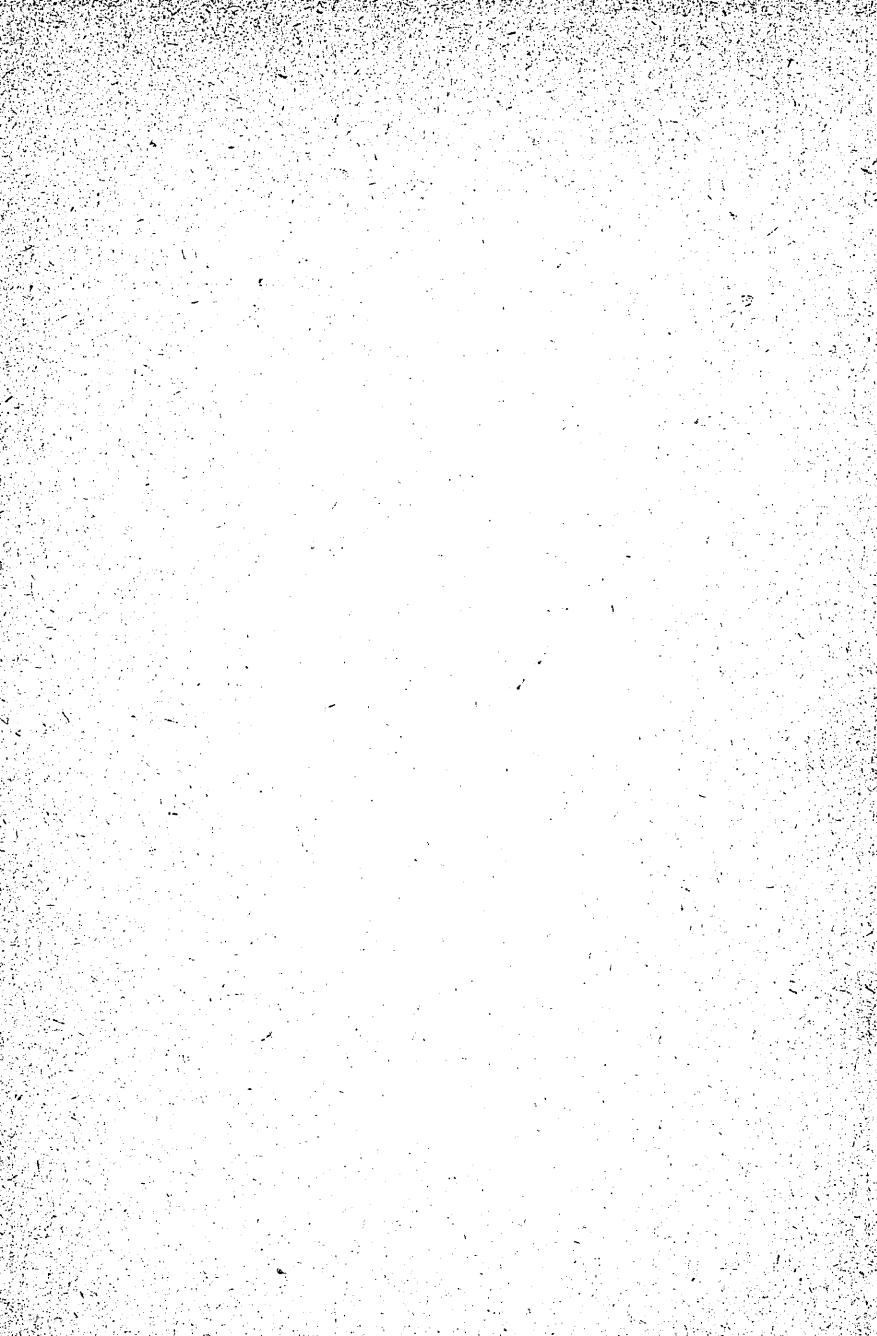
REV. T. R. WILLIAMS

~~220.64~~

~~W67.~~

The University of Chicago  
Libraries







**SHALL WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

## GOD'S OPEN DOORS

### Short Sermons

*Small crown 8vo., limp cloth*

*Price 1s. net.*

---

'We greatly admire the literary power, the thoughtfulness, the freshness, and the vigour of the sermons. They are very able sermons—sermons which could be written only by an able, thoughtful, and cultured man. They are the production of a man of serious convictions, who is thoroughly in earnest.'—*Aberdeen Free Press*.

'Mr. Rhondda Williams' sermons are characterized by independent and courageous thinking, keen insight into human life, and a wholesale acceptance of modern ideas.'—*British Weekly*.

---

A. & C. BLACK  
SOHO SQUARE, LONDON, W.

THE  
SHALL WE UNDERSTAND  
THE BIBLE

BY

THE REV. T. RHONDDA WILLIAMS

*REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION*



LONDON  
ADAM & CHARLES BLACK

1906



YHABLL 000000  
TO YHABLL 000000

BS-185

4/172

*Second Edition published March, 1902*

*Reprinted, with slight corrections, November, 1906*

518422

## PREFATORY NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE reception given to the first edition of this little book, and the repeated demands for it since it went out of print, have encouraged the present issue. The book has been revised, slight additions have been made at some points to the previous lectures, and a new lecture has been added on 'The Enhanced Value of the Bible through Historical Interpretation.'

THE AUTHOR.

BRADFORD,

*February, 1902.*



## PREFATORY NOTE TO THE READER.

THESE lectures were delivered in the schoolroom of Horton Lane Congregational Church, at the request of a Committee appointed by the superintendents and teachers of Congregational Sunday-schools in Bradford, to initiate some forward movement in Sunday-school teaching. They are printed at the request of those who heard them, and without elaboration. They are marked, therefore, not only by the limitations of the author's knowledge, as they would be in any case, but also by the limitations which are inevitable in lectures occupying in delivery about fifty minutes, and attempting so wide a range of subject. The author himself regards them as little more than an invitation to study the Bible, and the supply of a few general points of view. His hope is that they will stimulate interest in this most precious Library of the world, and create an appetite in his readers that will take them to the works of scholarly men who give their whole life to its investigation. The fatal objection to the traditional theory of the Bible is that the book cannot be understood by it. Those who know Historical Criticism from within, and not from hearsay, know that it is the best effort yet made to understand the Bible, and is founded on *the belief that the Bible is worth knowing*. Very few direct quotations are made in the text of the lectures, but it goes without saying that much of the material is drawn from the various works that deal with the subject.

One word more. There is a widespread belief among thoughtful people that the Sunday-school of the future must face these questions, or fail as an institution for teaching the Bible. The true lover of the Bible is called upon to rescue it from the grave which a dead, mechanical theory has already dug for it, and to reveal its living worth to the large world which now ignores it.

THE AUTHOR.

## ‘WHAT THE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE IS, AND THE NEED FOR IT.’

IT is, perhaps, only just to myself to say that the work I intend to do in these six lectures will be of a quite elementary kind. I do not expect to say anything which is not already familiar to all who have made a moderate acquaintance with the subject, my purpose being to introduce to some intelligent use and knowledge of the Bible those who have not yet begun, or scarcely begun, to look at it in the light of modern research. One essential condition of a successful study is that we should allow no theory to precede the facts; if you have any theory at all concerning the Bible in general, either traditional or new, I ask you to lay that theory aside and come merely to ask and honestly to find out what is *in* the Bible—what are the contents of these books. A student once complained to his Professor that the Professor’s way of teaching the Bible destroyed his reverence for it. The Professor reminded him that the only portion of the Bible they had yet studied together was the *Law of Holiness* (Lev. xvii.-xxvi.), and he asked the student whether he had ever read that portion before. The student admitted he had not! He had great reverence for it until he began to find out what it was! Such reverence is unreal, and stands in the way of a candid investigation—it is reverence for a mere theory. Noble character cannot be built without reverence, but true reverence is reverence for truth. If we found, *e.g.*, that David did not write the Psalms, or Solomon the Proverbs, or Isaiah the whole book

that bears his name, true reverence would call upon us to abandon the traditional theory and abide by the facts. This, then, is the one preliminary demand that I make upon you as a class, viz., that you should come with open, candid minds to ask, What is true? What are the facts? And I may as well say at once that if anyone comes here simply for the sake of defending some theory, without a proper care to base the theory on facts, I have no time to waste upon him. I am not here in the interest of any theory or any school of criticism, new or old, as such and for its own sake; I am here only to inquire as to the truth concerning the Bible.

Now, let us suppose that we are standing within the precincts of some ancient abbey. The abbey is at once an historical monument and a place of worship. A devout spirit can worship God in it without knowing anything about its history, and it is true that when the old abbey helps a man to realize the presence of God in his life, that is a more important thing than any knowledge of the history of the abbey could be. Nevertheless, we should all maintain that the historical knowledge has an importance of its own, and for many laudable purposes it is absolutely necessary. We go a step farther, and say that this historical knowledge as to how the old buildings were erected, when, and by whom, ought not to lessen their value as a place of worship, that it ought even to increase it, by giving us a larger fellowship with men who built for God. You might, in these remarks, substitute the Bible for the abbey. The poor African woman, who said of the old Book, 'This is the oil that makes my lamp to burn,' spoke truth from the depth of her soul. She knew nothing of the Higher Criticism or any other criticism. What she knew was that the Bible had helped her to find God; helped her to realize that He was with her every day, and that sustained her life. It is like the poor uneducated man who can worship in the old abbey. It is possible for a man to be spiritually fed by

old words of the Bible, whose original meaning he does not know. He may say, 'Salvation is of the Lord,' or, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and get help from it, though he does not mean at all what those meant who wrote the words. But in the case of the Bible as in that of the abbey, the fact that this good can be got without the kind of knowledge we are now seeking is no argument for not seeking the knowledge. Nor, if we preserve a right spirit, should inquiry and investigation, and analysis and critical judgment, destroy or impair the worshipful spirit. John Ruskin analyzed Nature minutely, and remained a fervent worshipper all his life. The greatest lovers of our ancient buildings are often the most careful investigators of all the facts concerning them. It is equally true that some of the greatest lovers of the Bible, some of those who value it most, spare no research into its natural history, and they discriminate most carefully between its different parts.

Moreover, it must be remembered that there is a traditional way of interpreting the Bible; there is a common prevailing view, and the teacher especially must interpret somehow, and the question is, *how*? Now, my contention is that the only proper method is the historical method. What is that? Come back again to the old abbey. I will select parts of a description of Furness Abbey, given by Mr. Brooke Herford, for illustration.

The abbey was founded by the Cistercian monks. They were a hard, plain, puritanic sect. They allowed no ornaments, no traceried windows, no images of saints, no sculpture of the human figure, no painted windows, no high, massive towers; everything must be stern, simple, and unadorned. How comes it, then, that you find all these forbidden things in Furness Abbey? By carefully studying the ruins you are able to read the story. You can trace there the old plan, simple and unadorned as the monks themselves, and then you can see how it has been departed



from ; how later hands altered this and superimposed that. You can see the patched masonry, where traceried windows of a later style have replaced the earlier Norman windows ; you can see how the little chancel has been enlarged ; there is a lofty, massive tower, which you know the original builders would not have put up, and you discover that it dates only just before the Reformation. 'All through the building you come upon traces of the gradual change.' To find out all the history of that old building, experts have to examine every doorway, every arch and window, and all sorts of marks which the ordinary visitor would not notice. And what is that work ? It might be called the Higher Criticism or the Historical Interpretation of Furness Abbey.

That is the kind of work that is being done to-day on all old literature. The Higher Criticism did not begin with the Bible. It is sometimes spoken of by ignorant people as a sort of device of the enemy for attacking the Bible, whereas it is the universal method of studying all ancient literature. In a very true sense it may be said that the founder of the scientific method was a Yorkshireman of the seventeenth century. Richard Bentley was born at Oulton, near Wakefield, in 1662. While he was King's librarian at Cambridge, he disputed the authorship of certain old Greek letters (148 in number), known as 'The Epistles of Phalaris.' Phalaris was a tyrant of Sicily, born 570 B.C. Bentley closed the controversy he had raised by a convincing array of knowledge and argument, which was the foundation of what was practically a new scientific method of treating old books. Men saw they must not take for granted that things were exactly what they appeared, and that old books bearing the name of one author might really be the work of many authors, and of different times. A hundred years later the same process was applied to the 'Iliad,' which, instead of being one poem by one man, is found to be the composite work of many hands.

Later still, the ancient history of Rome had to be recon-

structed, and the truth found as best it could in the mass of fable and legend. It was simply impossible that the Bible should be left alone. All ancient history was undergoing fresh examination by a scientific method, with the result everywhere that many traditional notions were upset and large reconstructions necessitated. Why should the history of the Jews be exempt? Any objection to submitting these writings to the same test to which all other writings are submitted is due to a *theory* concerning them, but we have no right to any theory until we know the facts. Anyway, whether we object or do not object, the Bible has been, and is being, examined by the method admitted to be valid in regard to every other literature.

Criticism is judgment. Some sort of judgment you must have. The question is, Is it to be competent or incompetent? Is it to be that of a slothful mind or a diligent mind? Is it to be the very best you can reach by taking every care and trouble, or the one that will cost you least?

Historical criticism is judgment in the light of history. It insists upon going behind tradition, to inquire into the authorship, the age, the meaning, and the spirit of the ancient writing. Setting aside all preconceived theories, it asks, 'What are the actual contents of this writing?' And then it asks whether the writing is one piece or a collection of pieces; if a collection, how related. Then it seeks to determine the age of the respective pieces and their inner meaning in the light of the time to which they belong. To reach its results, it uses all sources of available information—monuments, the study of language, quotations in works whose date is known, references in the document itself to known institutions or customs or persons, great differences of leading ideas in the writing, all of which could not belong to the same man and the same time, and many other criteria.

The negative results are often quite certain, while the positive results are uncertain. You may be able to prove

conclusively that Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews, and be quite uncertain as to who did; you may prove that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, but who did write it is quite another matter. The positive results of criticism vary from weak probability up to such a convergence of probabilities as amount to practical certainty. Just as in every other science, Biblical Criticism has had often to revise its conclusions, but the point to remember is this: that if historical criticism comes to wrong conclusions, it is only by more historical criticism these can be corrected. Geologists of long ago made mistakes. But the only remedy was more geology. Those who denounced the geologists in the name of religion were worse than useless. It is so with criticism. When criticism is wrong, what you want is more criticism, not ignorant denunciation. Among scholars of all schools this is now practically recognised. One of the best modern critics, Professor B. Wisner Bacon, in a new book ('An Introduction to the New Testament,' p. 24) says: 'We should do injustice to the line of conservative scholars if we failed to recognise the splendid scholarship and industry of German critics, such as B. Weiss, and Theo. Zahn, whom one hesitates to class as apologetic, so genuine is the purpose, especially of the former, to be free from traditional bias.' He says that Weiss rejects the sceptical way of refusing to scrutinize the documents, and that Zahn, that 'prince of conservative scholars,' 'knows no method but the universal methods of pure scientific criticism.' 'With all these differences of judgment, there is, nevertheless, to-day but one method of literary and historical criticism. The perfect balance of evidence in detailed results remains for him who shall be able to join to the amplest scholarship an impartiality of judgment, absolute, not only in intention, but in fact.'

That, I think, must suffice as to the first part of my subject—what historical interpretation means.

And now as to the necessity for it. An observant reading of the English Bible will raise questions at once.

If you were reading an English book purporting to be two centuries old, and came across the word 'telegraph' or 'telephone,' you would know that that, at any rate, could not have been written so long ago. In the same way, if a psalm, which is called a Psalm of David, speaks of the temple at Jerusalem, you know there was no temple in David's time, the first temple being built by Solomon. When you read in Gen. xxxvi. 31, a reference to a monarchy in Israel, you know the reference could not have been made by Moses any more than a writer of fifty years ago could have referred to boycotting. If you found the author speaking of the 'Eternities' and the 'Immensities,' you would feel sure he was acquainted with Carlyle. If he spoke of 'the power that makes for righteousness,' you would not place him before Arnold. One writer tells us of a painter who depicted the penitent thief on the way to the Cross receiving the last consolations from a monk! But it was too early for monks. The picture, however, though not historical as regards the thief, *is* historical as regards the painter. It tells you what *he* thought. That is what happens again and again in the historical books of the Bible. A man writes the story of days long, long past, but he writes under the influence of the ideas of his own time, and you have constantly to be on your guard to distinguish between the event and the writer's comment. You will find this constantly if you read Samuel and Kings and compare them with Chronicles. Chronicles was written in the Greek Age, say 300 B.C. approximate—*i.e.*, some centuries after the older histories. And you will often find things of the later time read back into the earlier, like the monk in the painting.

Hezekiah holds a passover with elaborate ritual, according to the Chronicler (2 Chron. xxix.), whereas the author of Kings gives the story of Hezekiah without any passover, and introduces the passover of the book of the

Covenant as a new thing in the reign of Josiah, and says no such passover as therein prescribed was held from the days of the Judges to the eighteenth year of Josiah. Then, again, why does the Chronicler speak of so many things as done by the sons of Aaron—the sons of Aaron are the priests in Chronicles—whereas in Kings the sons of Aaron are not mentioned? ‘Historical interpretation,’ says the writer of Kings, ‘does not mention the sons of Aaron as the priests, because the priesthood had not been confined to Aaron’s family at that time. By the Chronicler’s time they alone were the priests, and he puts them into the old story as the painter put the monk.’ But here the reader asks himself, ‘Are not Aaron’s sons made priests in the Pentateuch, which was before Kings?’ That, however, is the question: Was it before Kings? Criticism will tell you differently by-and-by. Meantime, this kind of thing shows the necessity for criticism. The Bible cannot explain itself. Suppose you ask how Israel came to have a King. You refer to the Books of Samuel, but there you find two stories. According to one it was *God* who wanted the people to have a King to save them from the Philistines. Samuel anointed Saul by God’s command. According to the other account, it was the people who clamoured for a King, and God granted them their desire in anger, and regarded their action as rebellion against Him. Here is a contradiction which compels us to the work of historical criticism.

If you ask who sold Joseph, you will find two answers given. According to one, his brethren sold him (Gen. xxxvii., two accounts), but according to another, the Midianite merchants stole him out of the pit and sold him in Egypt. Joseph in prison tells the chief butler (Gen. xl. 15), ‘I, too, was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews’; but later on he tells his brethren, ‘I am Joseph whom ye *sold* into Egypt.’ It would be dishonest to pretend that there is no contradiction, and the existence of the contradiction calls for historical interpretation.

The reader who passes from Isa. xxxix. to xl. finds that he has changed climates; the style of writing is vastly different; the whole atmosphere of thought is different; the historical situation is different; Jerusalem, instead of being threatened by a possible invasion, is at the end of a long punishment, having received double for her sins. The question arises, Did the same man write these chapters? The answer can only be found by historical interpretation. In Jer. xxxiii. 14-26 you have a passage which looks upon religious ritual in a different light from that in which Jeremiah usually regards it. This at once creates suspicion, and you wonder how he could so contradict his general position. Then you find that in the Septuagint version—the Greek Bible which was translated from the old Hebrew—that passage does not appear at all; you think it probable, then, that the passage was not in the original Jeremiah, that it must be the work of some later editor or scribe, that it is probably like the *tracery* of the window in Furness Abbey—the work of a later hand than that of the original builder. You must settle the question as best you can by historical inquiry. If you read in one of the Gospels that Judas committed suicide, and in the Acts that he died by accident, and that that was well known in Jerusalem, you have a contradiction which needs some explanation. These are only stray illustrations of the need for a critical method.

For further illustration, and also for some statement of how criticism has found things, I will now ask your attention to the first six books of the Bible, called the Hexateuch. The ordinary reader who reads carefully will soon meet with strange phenomena here. In Exod. vi. the name 'Jahweh' (= Jehovah, often translated 'Lord' in the English Bible) is revealed to Moses for the *first* time, and God tells him He was not known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by that name. But according to Genesis He *was*. In Gen. xv. 1, *e.g.*, it is Jahweh who speaks to Abraham.

There are two stories of creation, each with its own

order, and each with its own ideas of God. There are two different accounts of the Flood, two explanations of the origin of certain names—*e.g.*, 'Bethel,' 'Israel,' and 'Beersheba.' Two different reasons are given for the institution of the Sabbath. In Exodus it is to be kept because God had rested on the seventh day, and so hallowed it; in Deuteronomy the command is to keep it as a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt, and it was instituted for that purpose. The reader must ask, How did these double accounts come in? In Exod. xxxvii. you read that Bezaleel made the ark *after* Moses had received the new tables of the law, which tables Moses put into the ark. But in Deut. x. Moses is commanded to make the ark *before* he goes up to receive the tables, and he makes it himself and then puts the tables in. If we ask *where* the ark was kept, we should find equally conflicting accounts.

Another phenomenon that must attract notice in the Hexateuch is the different strata of legislation. On the supposition that all was the legislation of Moses, see what result you get regarding slavery, for example. In Exod. xxi. 1-10, the slave who has served six years and who by law is free in the seventh, may, if he so desire, go voluntarily into lifelong slavery, and make a contract that will bind him for the rest of his life. Next year, however, you find, according to Lev. xxv. 39-42, that an Israelite must not sell himself to another Israelite. Israelites can serve as hired servants to the year of Jubilee, and then be free, but an Israelite is not to hold another Israelite as a *bondman*; he can make bondmen—*i.e.*, slaves—of the heathen, but not of his own people. That would be very poor morality for us, but it was an exalted standard for Israelites so long ago. But according to Deut. xv. 12—*i.e.*, thirty-eight years later—Moses goes back again to the old view that an Israelite may be a slave for six years, and may voluntarily make himself a slave for ever. The law of Leviticus by this theory was designed for life in Canaan; and yet in Deuteronomy, on

the eve of entering Canaan, Moses himself ignores it. It is quite impossible that Moses could have been the author of all these laws. Again, according to Exod. xx. 24, the people are at liberty to worship in *many* places ; but the law of Deut. xii. 11 forbids it, and confines worship to one sanctuary only. Historical criticism maintains that these laws relate to different periods of the nation's life. Again, there is an unmistakable difference between Leviticus and Deuteronomy, so great that, if one were Mosaic, the other could not be. To mention only one point in illustration—viz., in Deuteronomy, all Levites are priests ; in Leviticus only one family of Levites are priests, the sons of Aaron. Connected with this is an elaborate ritual and a priestly atmosphere in Leviticus that separates the book by a wide chasm from Deuteronomy, and it is evident upon a comparison that some theory quite other than that of unity of authorship must be found. In this way the reader comes upon signs of composite authorship, as Bentley did with the epistles of Phalaris. When the work is undertaken to disentangle these interwoven writings, it goes without saying that we have to depend a great deal upon experts, as we should have to do in any department of ancient history, whether it be the examination of books, or abbeys, or rocks ; for many things we must rely upon the scholars. But what if the scholars do not agree ? It would be a miracle if they did at all points. A man is hard up for an objection when he objects to Biblical criticism on the ground that the critics are not agreed. In what department of investigation do experts always agree ? Doctors, *e.g.*, have many differences in diagnosis and prescription, but we are not foolish enough to say that therefore we will have nothing to do with them. Will you tell the student of English law that his wisest plan is to leave the subject alone until the authorities are agreed on all matters of chronology and interpretation ? Then why countenance so puerile an attitude regarding Jewish law ? This objection is really too



childish for serious treatment; I only mention it because many use it to prejudice the historical interpretation of the Bible who would never think of arguing in the same way in any other department.

When you go into these matters with any thoroughness, especially in the Hexateuch, it is the measure of agreement that surprises you, not the disagreement. That so many scholars working independently should be able to agree so much as to what documents are compiled in the Hexateuch, and be able to come so near to each other in the work of separating these documents, is really amazing, and, to my mind, convincing. On a host of minute particulars there is disagreement and uncertainty, but on the main features there is no substantial disagreement, and as little uncertainty as you can expect in the study of anything so ancient.

Let me try to give some rough idea of how the Hexateuch is made up, omitting unavoidably all details of the analysis.

It has been found that there are four principal documents in the Hexateuch. Some of these continue into the historical books, but for the present I leave that unnoticed. These principal documents are called J., E., D., and P.—*i.e.*, Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priest's Code. Yahwist = writer who calls God Jahweh—*i.e.*, Jehovah, often 'Lord' in our version. Elohist = writer who calls God Elohim, translated 'God' in the English Bible. Probably these represent, not merely different writers, but different schools of thought. Scholars have been able to separate these documents. Though they are so interwoven that you often have two documents represented in the same verse, it is possible to pick out and put together each document, and you find that each makes a story by itself, and without the double accounts and the contradictions to which I referred—*e.g.*, one story of creation belongs to P., the other belongs to J. Each document is seen to have its own distinguishing characteristics, its own leading ideas, its own institutions, and its own style. It is a great mistake to suppose

that all is decided upon mere evidence of language ; the language is only one part of the evidence. The evidence is of a *cumulative* nature ; its strength and convincingness in regard to main conclusions depend upon a convergence of many lines of proof. In a single lecture it is impossible to give these proofs, and impossible to describe in detail the characteristics of the documents or their limits. As to limits, I can but say that P. is interwoven with J. and E. in Genesis and Exodus and Numbers ; that it includes the whole of Leviticus, though there it incorporates older legislation called the law of Holiness, chapters xvii.-xxvi. ; it has only a few verses in Deuteronomy, but a considerable section in Joshua. D. is practically Deuteronomy. J. and E. are found in all except Leviticus and Deuteronomy. This is in the rough. As to characteristics, I can only give one or two illustrations. Think, *e.g.*, of the question of *sacrifice*. According to J. and E., *sacrifice* existed from the beginning ; it was the natural way in which man approached God. The patriarchs in these stories build altars and offer sacrifice, and Moses, in Exod. xxiv. 5, even sent young men to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings to the Lord. But P. looks at these things very differently. Sacrifice, in his view, is a special Divine institution ; it does not properly begin until Aaron and his sons are consecrated to do it. In J., *e.g.*, when Noah comes out of the ark, he builds an altar and sacrifices, but in P. he does no such thing ; God makes a covenant and Noah is a party to it, but there is no altar and no sacrifice. The priestly school of P., in writing ancient history, would not represent a layman as offering sacrifice. The same difference marks these documents in the case of the other patriarchs.

In D. any Levite is a priest, but P. (Num. xviii. 7) so confines the priesthood to Aaron and his sons that any stranger coming nigh to it shall be put to death. When D. writes the story of Moses appointing Joshua as his successor, the whole transaction takes place between the

two men in the sight of God and the people; but when P. comes to tell the same story, Moses has to place Joshua before Eleazer the *priest*, and *he* must play an important part in the transaction. To the priestly school the thing would not have been valid without a priest. Again, in D. the priests have no *property*, and certain charitable allowances are therefore to be made for them; they are classed with the poor who have to be looked after. But in P. their revenue is greatly increased in several ways, and they are also to possess forty-eight cities, with allotments of pasture land besides. These are only very few instances; I have no time for more. Yet, by the traditional theory that all this was Mosaic legislation, all these contradictory points of view were taken by one legislator; all the very different conceptions of God, of worship, and of sacrifice were the conceptions of one and the same man; and all these conflicting regulations were issued in one lifetime for practice in Canaan. Whatever is or is not right in the conclusions of the higher criticism, one thing is absolutely beyond doubt—that the old theory breaks to pieces. The old view cannot be held by any man who works candidly and honestly at the subject. Now, when the limits of these separate documents have been settled, the question arises as to their respective dates. To come to any conclusion on this point it was necessary to do two things—viz., to compare the documents very carefully with each other, and then to compare them with history as best known. This was a big task, and as our knowledge of ancient history is constantly open to revision through discoveries and other investigations, conclusions of this kind must be held liable to revision too. There has been, however, and still is, practical unanimity that J. and E. are dated from the ninth to the eighth century B.C.; of these J. is the older. There has been much controversy concerning the respective dates of D. and P. I cannot even epitomize it here. The prevailing modern view is that the true order of the documents is

as follows: J., E., D., P. J., E. existed, it is held, before 750; they were combined by 650. Deuteronomy is placed about 621. When it was *composed* is a doubtful question, but it comes definitely into the national history, and it is adopted by the people, in 621. We have a date for Josiah's reformation. That reformation was based on a law-book found in the Temple, and the things done by the reformers are the things prescribed in Deuteronomy, not the things prescribed in Exodus or Leviticus; the inference is that that law-book was Deuteronomy, though, probably, not the whole book as we have it now. Hence the date 621. During the exile in Babylon, Deuteronomy was combined with J., E. There, too, the old histories—Judges, Kings, and, perhaps, Samuel—were revised and edited. And the editor of that day did not scruple to put his own comments into the text. These editors worked under the influence of Deuteronomy. That is why you find a man often condemned for conduct which evidently never struck him as wrong; the law which made it wrong did not exist in his time, but it did in the time of the editor.

It was found, however, that the Jews in Jerusalem were very negligent of worship, and that Deuteronomy was not sufficient to meet the case. It was to meet this that men of priestly interest in Babylon drew up P., the Priest's Code, composed somewhere between 538-444. In 444, under Ezra, the people solemnly adopted either the Priest's Code or the whole combined Pentateuch.

By a study of the history of Israel, when you have learned to discount the editors' notes, you find that Deuteronomy was not known before the seventh century—*e.g.*, you have Amos and Hosea prophesying in the eighth century, and they give you no hint of knowing Deuteronomy. They do not demand from the people what Deuteronomy demands, nor do they blame them for violating its requirements. Deuteronomy demands worship at one central sanctuary. These prophets do not, nor do they hold that there is anything wrong in

having many sanctuaries, though the resort to sanctuaries is denounced because the claims of morality are neglected. So in the historical books, men have many sanctuaries and images without the least consciousness that they were breaking a law. If Deuteronomy existed, even the leaders did not seem to know anything about it. By the same kind of argument, and many others, the conclusion is reached that P. was not in existence before the captivity in Babylon. When you read the historical books, remember that Kings is coloured by a Deuteronomic editor; and Judges, though less so; and Samuel scarcely at all; that before Chronicles was written, P. had come into existence, and that is why there is a priestly colour on events which are without it in Kings.

All this, and much more, is necessary to our understanding the history of the Hebrew development. It is difficult work, but intensely interesting when you get into it, and it redeems the Bible from being a mere Divine apparatus to be adored but not read. It becomes a living book, full of human interest and of lasting worth; in many senses the most important story in the world, the story of the thought and life of that wonderful nation to which Jesus belonged, and the story, too, that leads up to and includes Him. To understand the Old Testament is the true preparation for a historical interpretation of Christianity. One conviction is borne in irresistibly upon the mind when the story of this people is properly traced—viz., that ‘God marshalled them, gave them their goal.’ Their way was certainly not in themselves alone.

## ‘DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF GOD IN THE BIBLE.’

WE should all say that the main value of the Bible is that it inspires us with a sense of God's presence with us. That sense of God constitutes the essence of religion. All who are aware of Him have some sort of religion. But if we want to know further what sort of religion it is, we must ask what sort of idea, what sort of conception of God, is associated with the sense of His presence. While the *sense* of God constitutes the essence of religion, the *conception* of God conditions its quality. It is important, therefore, not only to feel strongly and deeply that God is with you—you may have that and be a Sultan ordering the massacre of Armenians, or a Saul of Tarsus persecuting Christians as a service to God. You must also have the loftiest possible conception of God, of the character of God. Let us lay it down as an axiom of our Christian life that no lower idea of God will do than the highest we have known. The moment you lower your idea of God you lower the whole standard of life. God must be to us the impersonation of our ideal sanctities. Allow nothing which you feel to be in the least wrong to mix itself with your conception of God. This I take to be an essential qualification of a Sunday-school teacher—that he will on no account allow himself or his scholars to think of God except as infinitely righteous and loving. I think we shall all agree in saying that we recognise this conception of God as the Christian revelation. You will find it, therefore, in the Bible. It constitutes the eternal value of the Bible. It is

the clearness, the fulness, the richness, the certainty of that idea of God in the Bible which lifts this literature into its place of supremacy in the literature of the world. But it is necessary to remember that, though this conception of God is to be found in the Bible, many other conceptions of God are there too. We shall find conceptions very inconsistent with the Christian idea of God. We shall find God thought of in a way we cannot think of Him; and doing things which, if we have the Christian idea, we cannot believe He did; and saying things we cannot believe He said. It is necessary to distinguish between the different conceptions of God, and to fix their relative values. To regard the Bible as the Word of God in the sense that you can open it anywhere, and be sure to find His word for your own life, leads to endless error and confusion. That is the weakness of any pledge to read some portion of the Bible every day. The idea is, that in any portion you get God's word, which is not true. In many parts you will find ascribed to God actions and words which utterly contradict Jesus Christ. To believe them would be to disbelieve Him, and to twist your own moral sense too. The whole Bible can never be the rule of faith and practice. To *practise* Leviticus you would have to turn your chapels into slaughter-houses, and put the New Testament in the fire. How could you *practise* Deuteronomy, which confines worship to one place? When people use these phrases they simply do not think what they mean. It is no doubt a generous habit to speak of a whole literature in the terms of its highest content. There is a profound truth at the back of this. When you discover a man's ideal it is profoundly true to say, 'That's the man'—it is the essence of the man, it is what he is aiming at, and, at his depths, what he is aiming at he *is*. Still it would be dangerous therefore to take that man as infallible, and to believe all that he does is right and all he says is true. It is just as necessary, for a true estimate, to see where he fails of his ideal as to see what the ideal is. Now, to take the Christian idea of God

and say, 'That's the Bible,' is true only in that way. It is the *consummation* of the Bible; it is what the whole thing led up to; and it is therefore the deepest truth and meaning of the whole development. But we must not therefore think that all in the teaching that preceded it is infallible—that is simply to confuse our own moral sense, and to obscure the ideal itself. What I want, therefore, to impress upon teachers is that, in teaching thoughts of God from the Bible, they should always hold the highest conception of God which they have formed by the help of Jesus, and all the good, as the key to the right or wrong of any other conception presented to them. Sacrifice at once any notion you may have of an infallible book, or of the inspiration of any old law-giver, or seer, or prophet, or writer, rather than lower your conception of God. Our theology is of the utmost importance. Do not allow yourselves, if you are revolting from old beliefs, to say that beliefs are of no importance, that conduct is everything. What a man really believes about God (not necessarily what he *formally* believes) is the foundation of his life. Approach the Bible, then, I ask you, to teach about God with the idea firmly fixed in your mind that God is the impersonation of the very highest and best you have yet conceived, and infinitely transcends that. Wherever, then, in the Bible you come upon a conception of God lower than this, do not hesitate to point out that it is lower, and to ascribe it to the special condition of the individual who wrote it, or to the stage of culture and development at which the people were who conceived it; and if they ascribed it to a revelation from God Himself, do not hesitate to say that they were mistaken. Your scholars will lose nothing by thinking that the Bible is imperfect, or the old prophet imperfect, but their souls are damaged if they think God imperfect. If *e.g.*, you read in Num. xxv. 16-18, 'The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites and smite them, for they vex you with their wiles,' never allow the children to think that God said so.



Point out to them the difference between that morality and the morality of Jesus: 'Pray for those who persecute you;' 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' If you read in Exod. iii. 22 directions ascribed to God as to how the Israelites are to steal the property of the Egyptians by pretending to borrow it, take care you do not allow the children ever to think that God gave such directions.

If you read in 1 Kings xxii. 20-23 that God put a lying spirit into the mouths of prophets in order to entice a man into wrong-doing, take care you do not tolerate that conception of God. There is no difficulty in setting aside these views of God if we remember that the Bible is the history of growing thought and life covering many centuries of time. I now want to illustrate the use of the Bible which I am recommending to you.

Last week I spoke of a document in the Hexateuch, which also continues into the historical books, known as J. This represents the Jahwist school during a considerable period of time. It is regarded now as the oldest of the documents. It incorporates, however, bits of literature older than itself, —some snatches of old song, *e.g.* Behind it lie the tales and the folk-lore, and old national traditions which always precede the writing age in any nation. J., as we have it, is interwoven with some other documents, and was itself, no doubt, revised and edited both before and after its combination. This means for experts a great deal of minute work, which we cannot be expected to master. But the main features of this old document have been set before us unmistakably. The only feature I want to notice now is its conception of God. The theology of the Jahwist is very childish and elementary, though it is not all on the same level. He thinks of God very much as in human form, holding intercourse with men almost as one of themselves. His document begins with Gen. ii. 4<sup>b</sup>, and its first portion continues, without break, to the end of chapter iv. This

portion contains the story of Eden. Here Jahweh *moulds* dust into human form and *breathes* into it; *plants* a garden and puts the man in it. Jahweh comes to the man in his sleep and takes part of his body to make a woman, and so skilfully, apparently, that the man never wakes under the operation. Jahweh *walks* in the garden like a man in the cool of the day. He even *makes coats* for Adam and Eve. Farther on the Jahwist has a flood story, in which Jahweh *repents* that he had made man, and decides to drown him, saving only one family. When all is over, and Noah sacrifices on his new altar, Jahweh *smells* a sweet savour, just as a hungry man smells welcome food. When men build the Tower of Babel, Jahweh *comes down* to see it—he cannot see it from where he is. In Gen. xviii. the Jahwist tells a story of three men coming to Abraham's tent. Abraham gives them water to wash their feet, and bread to eat, and Sarah makes cakes for them, and 'they did eat'; altogether they seemed to have had a nice time. As the story goes on, he leaves you to infer that one of these was Jahweh himself. It is J. who describes the story of Jacob *wrestling* with some mysterious person who, by inference, is Jahweh. He tells a very strange story in Exod. iv. 24, that when Moses was returning into Egypt, at Jahweh's own request, Jahweh met him at a lodging-place, and sought to kill him. In Exod. xiv. 15 it is said Jahweh took the wheels off the chariots of the Egyptians. If we wanted to believe that such statements were true at all we should resort to the device of saying they were figurative. But J. meant them literally. The Jahwist would have no difficulty in thinking of God in this way. The story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah belongs to this same document, in which you remember Jahweh says, 'I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know' (Gen. xviii. 21). That God was omniscient and omnipresent had never occurred to the Jahwist. Jahweh, like a

man, had to go and see if he wanted to know. There is, however, some compensation in the fact that he can move about without difficulty—he can come down and go up. One might say, perhaps, that in J., though Jahweh cannot *be* everywhere, he can go to almost any place. All this is just like a child's thought. The child, at Christmas, can believe that, though Santa Claus cannot be everywhere, he can move about with wonderful facility, and though he is a man he is rather mysterious. The Jahwist's thought of God represents the childhood stage of the national life. This document itself, however, shows some advance upon this level of thought. When Jahweh comes to Moses in the burning bush, the ground is holy, and Moses must not draw too near. Jahweh is not so familiar and accessible as in the other instances I referred to. This represents later thought of the Jahwist school, but it *is* the same school, and even in this very story Jahweh has to 'come down' to deliver the people from Egypt. Again, in this document men worship Jahweh from the beginning. Knowledge of Jahweh is not limited to the chosen people. 'Nimrod was a mighty hunter before Jahweh;' Laban asks Jahweh's blessing on Abraham's servant; Balaam has to do with Jahweh; Jahweh worship is looked upon as the primitive religion of man. Nevertheless, Abraham is definitely called, and one line of his descendants are the chosen people to whom Jahweh promises the land, and for whom he will drive out other nations. It is in this chosen nation and all its history that the Jahwist is intensely interested. Jahweh here becomes the God of this people, just as other peoples had gods of their own. The *moral* character of Jahweh is by no means high. Moses is represented on a higher elevation more than once, if judged by our modern standard—*e.g.*, Jahweh threatens to kill the people for disobedience, and Moses pleads for them, and he succeeds in persuading Jahweh when he reminds him that his fame will suffer; the Egyptians will hear of his killing the people he delivered,

and will say he was not able to bring them into the land ! To this argument Jahweh gives way. Without further illustration, we can surely see that here, throughout an entire document, is a conception of God which the growth of mind has transcended. There is truth in it, as in every stage of culture, but it is a stage, and a stage left behind. We turn now to the conception of God in the Elohist.

This document is called the Elohist because its name for God is *Elohim*, not Jahweh, up to the time when Jahweh revealed himself as such to Moses. Here, at once, is a great difference between the Elohist and the Jahwist. To the latter even the ancestors of Abraham had worshipped Jahweh. But in the Elohist document Joshua says to all the people of Israel (Josh. xxiv. 2), 'Thus saith Jahweh, the God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, and served *other gods*.' The two documents fundamentally contradict each other on this point. To the Jahwist, Jahweh worship was from the beginning ; to the Elohist it was a new revelation to Moses. Jahweh was the God who called Abraham, but Abraham did not know him as such. The Elohist has got the idea of progressive revelation. To him it was possible to know more of God, to discover a new name, a new character, as time went on. It is exceedingly interesting to find this so far back ; it comes almost as a rebuke to many who have scarcely grasped the idea of progressive revelation yet.

And the Elohist's way of thinking of God is very different from the Jahwist's. We are dealing here with more mature mental conception. He is more reflective ; he has left the child stage. And so the familiarity with which the Jahwist spoke of God disappears, God does not come among men almost like one of themselves ; he is more distant and awful. He comes mostly in vision and in dream. His voice is often heard when no form is mentioned, and sometimes his angel speaks for him. With E. intermediaries are beginning, and God is being distanced from man.

God does still speak with Moses face to face and mouth to mouth, but with no one else so. The people when they have heard God at Sinai even beg that he will speak to them no more, but let Moses mediate—God dwells in the thick darkness. This conception of God is no doubt less crude and simple than the Jahwist's, and represents later thought. It is in this document that God is so often said to 'prove' men.

The story of Abraham and Isaac on Moriah belongs to the Elohist, and is perhaps the outstanding instance of this point. I should like briefly to illustrate how this story might be taken in a Sunday-school class. As too often taught it presents a very barbarous view of God. That God should even for a moment of trial ask a man to kill his own child is a horrible thought. I wish no Sunday-school walls would show a picture of Abraham, with his uplifted knife, ready to kill his son. Such a picture tends to degrade our thought of God and man. It is not many years since a man in Massachusetts was tried for the murder of his child, and he declared it was a religious act, that through reading the story of Abraham and Isaac he became convinced that God wanted his child. I remember, when a boy, hearing a preacher tell the story of a father who had been brought to love God through losing a favourite child. The man and the preacher believed that God wanted for Himself the love which was bestowed on the child, and that He took the child away in order to get it. These are relics of paganism which cling to the Christian world. They are often supported by wrong views of Bible stories, such as the story of Abraham and Isaac. We have seen already that words are often attributed to God, which we must not consider His—which we cannot if we believe in Christianity. The story of Abraham and Isaac belongs to the class of ætiological myths known in every nation—*i.e.*, myths which arise as acceptable accounts of the causes of things, of some custom or institution.

The Greeks, *e.g.*, found that they had dropped the custom of human sacrifices, and substituted the sacrifices of animals. To account for that there arose the mythical story of the goddess Artemis, demanding the life of Agamemnon's daughter, and then saving her at the last moment and providing a stag for sacrifice in her stead.

The Hebrews, too, found they had left off sacrificing children and were sacrificing animals instead. And it is this tradition that is thrown into the form of a tale in the story of Mount Moriah, and *Morah*, significantly enough, means 'place of instruction.'

The sacrifice of children to the gods was a common heathen practice. It was not unknown in Israel. The story of Jephthah and his daughter reminds us of it (Judg. xi. 29-40). Mark this: it is said that the *spirit of the Lord* came upon Jephthah, and he vowed, if successful in war, to offer unto the Lord as a burnt-offering whatsoever came forth of the doors of his house to meet him when he returned, and when he found to his sorrow that his own daughter was the victim, he could not go back. Jephthah and his daughter thought it right she should be sacrificed. Ahaz the King passed his son through the fire; so did Manasseh. Jeremiah says they had even built special places in order to do this, and he protested that God had never commanded it (Jer. vii. 31; xix. 5; xxxii. 35).

You can use the story in class to show how people have gradually been instructed in the way of serving God, how they grew to know it was wrong to kill their children. You might then show how a still higher point of view is given in the words of Micah that God wants neither the firstborn, nor rams, nor rivers of oil, but requires only that we should 'do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God.' You could show how that revelation of the prophets rose to its purer heights in Jesus Christ. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' The use of such tales is not to teach us what the will of God is for us now,

but to show us how God has led men up through darkness to larger light, how revelation is an ever unfolding process, how in their thought of God men have ascended by a rugged road, by a path marked with blood, to the knowledge of God in Christ, where the real sacrifice is a heart loyal to God and a life in harmony with His will. Then you can turn the story round, and show in what sense God does ask from us the lives of our children; how we must do our best to give them to God by consecrating them to high ideals of life; teach them that it is better for them to suffer than to be dishonourable; better to be poor and unsuccessful than get on in the world by dishonest means; that sometimes in order to be true to conscience and to God they must be willing to climb the sacrificial mount and submit to pain and suffering. All these and many more beautiful lessons can be drawn from the old story. I have spent a little time over it because teachers sometimes say, 'We cannot teach in the old way, and do not know what to teach.' There is plenty to teach, and far more in the Bible in the new light than in the old.

The Elohist apparently regarded human sacrifices as a temporary way of 'proving' men. They were indeed a proof that man belonged to God, and that all he had was God's, but they proved also that he very much needed a better knowledge of God's character and will.

The Elohist's conception of God's moral character is also very different from ours to-day. In the so-called 'Book of the Covenant' (Exod. 21-23) there are certainly many admirable moral precepts, and the Decalogue, though not in its present expanded form, is in this document. Yet we must not expect to find in the Elohist's God a satisfactory moral character for our God to-day.

The Elohist, *e.g.*, does not condemn polygamy—God's favourites may have many wives, and no one thinks it wrong, any more than the Chinese think it wrong for their Emperors. In war the Elohist's God would approve things

which, if done now, would be denounced as barbarous. The utter destruction of men, women, and children, and cattle by Joshua in Jericho, the hewing of Agag by Samuel, the barbarities which David executed on the Amalekites, are all done by the command of God. What has happened in our country recently? The way in which these Old Testament commands to fight have been quoted even in some pulpits to justify war shows how tremendously important it is to take the historical view of these matters.

There is no atrocity which you cannot justify if you proceed by the other method. The Elohist's God would never be a party to the Geneva Convention. To read these old commands as commands for us is simply to reverse twenty-five centuries of progress and put us back in a semi-barbarous age, and it is certainly to make the Cross of Christ of none effect.

In the Elohist's legislation no sorceress must be suffered to live. That was why 100,000 witches were burned in Germany in one century after the Reformation. The appeal to the Bible produced that result. The Elohist puts to death, utterly destroys, the man who worships any god other than Jahweh. It is easy to see that the Spanish Inquisition is nearer to that point of view than it is to the Christ. For practical life, the historical interpretation of the Bible is of immense importance. We must learn that such views of God as we have been considering, though they are in the Bible, are not to be our views.

In very early times, when the Israelites were living a wandering, half-civilized life, it would have been difficult to see in them any superiority over the other tribes about them. Their religion was, of course, poor, like their life. Stocks and stones had taken the same place in their worship as in that of the others. They had also seen the sky with its wonders, and connected with its powers there were gods, they thought. Probably when Jahweh first became the national god he was the god of rain and thunderstorms.



There are traces of this at a comparatively late time. The Syrians are defeated by Israel in battle, and they say 'their god is the god of the hills.' The reference, probably, is to the belief that Jahweh was the storm god, and the hills drew the rain from the clouds and urged the elements to battle. In the so-called Song of Deborah we read: 'Jahweh, when thou wentest forth out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens also dropped—yea, the clouds dropped water. The mountains flowed down at the presence of Jahweh.' He was still the storm god. In Ps. xviii. 7-15 is a description of Jahweh as a storm god. Of course, he was much more than this to the people at the time these passages were written, but they show how the old conceptions lingered on, as old conceptions do, side by side with broader ones.

Amos, in the eighth century, tells us that the Israelites had worshipped stars when they were in the wilderness. When they settled in Canaan they partook in the Canaanite worship of Baal and Ashera side by side with Jahweh, and they had household gods (teraphim) also.

In Judg. viii. 27 we read that Gideon, the man who refused to be made King, saying, 'Jahweh shall rule over you,' nevertheless made an ephod and worshipped it, and the people worshipped it. The man who wrote the story thought this unfaithful to Jahweh, because he was judging by a later standard; but Gideon saw nothing wrong in it. In Judg. xvii. we read of a man of Mount Ephraim whose name was Micah. This man worshipped Jahweh, but he also had a house of gods, and he made an ephod and images, and was not aware of any inconsistency. Later on the children of Dan 'set up Micah's graven image all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.' All this shows that at one time Jahweh was one of many gods; other gods were real gods. The Israelites themselves believed, for example, that Chemosh was as truly the god of the Moabites

as Jahweh was theirs, and they speak of Chemosh giving territory to his people to inherit, just as Jahweh had given them territory (Judg. xi. 24). Some years ago a stone was discovered on which there was an inscription by a Moabite King called Mesha, written about 900 B.C. This is part of the translation: 'I am Mesha, King of Moab. . . . I have raised this stone to Chemosh, for he has delivered me from all my enemies, and given me vengeance upon all that hate me. Omri, King of Israel, oppressed Moab many years, for then Chemosh was angry with his land. But in my days Chemosh said, "I will look upon him and upon his house, and Israel shall fall for ever." . . . Chemosh took pity on the people, I laid siege to Kirjathaim, which the King of Israel had fortified, and I took the city and slew all the inhabitants in honour of Chemosh. And Chemosh said to me, "Go forth, and take the city of Nebo, from Israel." Then I went out by night, fought against the place from the dawn of the day till noon, took it, and slew all the inhabitants; and I took away all the sacred vessels of Jahweh and consecrated them to Chemosh.' Just as a King of Israel would speak of Jahweh, the King of Moab speaks of Chemosh. His god sends him to battle. If he is defeated the god is angry; if he succeeds the god is favourable. And we have seen that there was a time when the Israelite believed Chemosh to be as real for Moab as Jahweh for himself. You find the same thing everywhere. The old Assyrian Kings said exactly the same thing of the god Assur. Assur sent them to battle, gave defeat or victory as he thought fit. The history, however, is very obscure up to the time of Samuel, and uncertain for some time after. Samuel organized a Jahweh party. David worshipped Jahweh only, though he regards it as possible to be driven out of Jahweh's inheritance into that of other gods (1 Sam. xxvi. 19). Solomon was not exclusively devoted to Jahweh, for he built places of worship for other deities as well. At a later time Jahweh was worshipped in the form of a calf, the

Canaanite Baal was worshipped at Court and by many of the people. There was great danger lest the Jahweh religion should be absorbed in other forms. It was a wonderful providence that rescued it, and secured that out of that impure Jahweh worship, that poor idea of God, not from Moab or any other people, was developed a religion which made possible that Christianity which is God's highest and richest revelation to the world. Providence used two weapons to secure that victory: one was social trouble, and the other a succession of prophets, such as the world has not known in any other nation. In times of oppression the national feeling and faith were kindled afresh, and threw the people back upon what was most peculiarly their own. And the prophets came. Elijah and Elisha did much to root out Baalism, though they did not object to calf-worship. With Amos, however, the new era was ushered in. The revolution of Jehu had overthrown the idolatrous house of Ahab, but unrighteousness, oppression of the poor, licentiousness and revelry, had become flagrant vices. It was in this dark night of sin that the star of the new prophecy appeared. The herdsman of Tekoa went up to the luxurious north to preach righteousness. They did not like it. Such people never do like it. They wanted to be religious without being righteous. Amos would not have it, and therefore they would not have Amos. They stopped his preaching, but they could not prevent him writing, and the writing is still in our hands. He and his successors preached a God who had a distinct moral character. Their idea of God was not pure monotheism—*i.e.*, it did not utterly exclude the existence of other gods; but there must be *only one* god for Israel—Jahweh. Not only so, but Jahweh is supreme over all other gods. They are real, but they are subordinate. Jahweh has rivals, but no equals. There is no god like unto him. Jahweh even overrules the movements of other nations. This prophecy represents a great advance in the conception of God, not only on the

governmental side, in the concept of power and supremacy, but also on the moral side, in the concept of justice and mercy. God now is in a *moral* relation to His people, not merely a national one. He would note not only whether they were Israelites, but whether they were good. The logical outcome of such a doctrine would be the universality and unity of God, but it took ages to work out. The prophets of the eighth century worked at the foundations, but did not see the completion of the structure. They did a noble work in the upward evolution of religion. The world needed a still higher conception of God than theirs, and their work made that higher conception possible. Jeremiah came with his wonderful conception of God writing a new covenant in the hearts of His people, making religion spiritual and free, and with his proclamation of Divine forgiveness. And in Babylon there arose some great soul, whose name we do not know, who climbed the mountain of Holy Communion to greet the greater day of God, and to become herald of the larger light for the captives of darkness—the man who saw that it was a small thing for God to save one nation, and declared that Israel must become a light to lighten the Gentiles, and Israel's God a Saviour to the ends of the earth. Here you reach the high-water mark in the Old Testament conceptions of God. I have no time to follow the theme into the New Testament ; I will only say that it was in the succession of these great prophets Jesus came, and it was their truth He rescued from neglect and carried to its highest culmination at a time when the world's greatest need was a universal religion. Expanding intellectual life in Greece had broken the national forms of its first statements ; Roman conquests had created something like political unity ; the idea of universalism was broadening philosophy and extending government, and the time had come for a universal religion. And in the fulness of time came Jesus, to whom God was Father of man, as man, the relation of God to man personal, spiritual, uni-

versal, to whom the highest religion was love and service, and who bequeathed to the world the grandest of all faiths, the faith that God Himself is incarnate in humanity, working in it to will and to do His own good pleasure, and will continue to work 'till we all come, in the fulness of faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'

## ‘DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF PROVIDENCE IN THE BIBLE.’

**I**N the idea of God there is involved the idea of His relation to the world—the world of Nature and of man. Our work is now to find how the latter part of this relation was conceived in Jewish thought within Bible times. Like all other nations, the Jews felt that they were having to do with a higher Power than themselves. How this Power was dealing with them became a subject of reflective thought ; it was, indeed, the problem of Providence.

This problem is raised by the *changes*, the alternations of the world and of life. If life were an eternal day or an everlasting night, a summer without end or a winter without break, there would be no problem of Providence. An endless day would create no spectre ; an endless night would kindle no hope. But when these alternate, men ask what they mean. What a multitude of myths can be traced to the mysterious impression made upon the minds of ancient time by the dawn which dethrones the night, and leads in victorious day, and by the spring which smiles in beauteous resurrection over the graves of winter, by the apparent struggle between light and darkness ! So in human life, when brightness is changed to gloom, or sorrow turned to joy ; when trial becomes triumph, or victory turns into defeat ; when waves and billows roll over men whose sea was calm, then ‘deep calleth unto deep,’ the deep of life’s great mystery calleth to the deep of human thought for some solution. So theories of Providence arise.

And to no ancient nation did *changes* occur to make people

think out what God's way of dealing with them was in a more significant way than to the Jews. They were, indeed, 'tossed from vessel to vessel,' as one of their writers described it. From a wandering life they came through an awful struggle into something like an ordered unity, and then through fights and wars into settled government. After these victories, however, came new enemies. Delivered from one, they fell into the hands of another: delivered from Egypt, they had to fight with Syria, then with Assyria, and later with Babylon. After the Babylonian Conquest came the Persian, then the Greek, then the Roman, until Jerusalem was finally destroyed, and the old cultus fell to pieces. It is, indeed, a story of storms, and no wonder we go back to see what conceptions of Providence such a people had, and how the conception developed as time with its wondrous events went on!

Early in the story you have the conception that the great concern of Providence was to secure the good fortunes of Israel as a people. In Josh. xxiv. 18 we read: 'The Lord drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land; therefore we also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.' But in Judg. ii. 21 the Lord is angry with Israel, and says He will not drive out the nations which were left when Joshua died, but will retain them to 'prove' Israel. 'So,' says the writer (Judg. ii. 23), 'the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered He them into the hands of Joshua.' In spite of the contradiction in the historical statement, which is of no importance for my present purpose, the idea is the same in both passages: that God is concerned with the fortunes of this particular people, and that all other peoples must be either driven out of their land, or used for the good fortune of Israel. It is an exclusively national view of Providence. It is rooted in the old conceptions of primitive peoples. Robertson Smith, in his book on 'The Religion of the Semites'—a book which is almost indispensable for

understanding the Old Testament, because it describes the old traditional religion which lies behind Judaism, the religion of Semitic peoples, of which the Hebrews were but one race, holding religious conceptions and usages in common with the whole group of kindred peoples—says that the social body was made up of gods as well as men. The god of a clan was the chief member of the clan, and he was therefore an enemy to the enemies of the clan; he took part in the feuds of the clan, and therefore no individual could change his clan or nation without changing his god. In those times hardly any but outlaws changed their religion. You will find this old conception reflected in the Old Testament. It lies behind the words of Ruth—*e.g.*, ‘Thy people shall be my people, and thy god my god’; to become a member of another nation meant changing gods. In the words of David (1 Sam. xxvi. 19), to be driven out from Israel is to be driven out from serving Jahweh. I have asked you to read Judg. iii. 15-30; iv. 17-24; v. 24-31. The first is the story of Ehud getting at Eglon, Israel’s enemy, by deceit, and killing him—an act followed by a great slaughter of Moabites. The second is the story of Jael pretending to play the friend to Sisera and then murdering him. The third is the eulogy of Jael for doing so, as ‘blessed above women,’ in the so-called Song of Deborah. Here, you see, Providence is only concerned with the fortunes of Israel; any deceit and any cruelty is right which brings success to this people. Providence is not concerned with morality; nor is it concerned with individuals, except as the individual serves or opposes Israel.

This old conception underwent considerable change. You will find it very decisive in the eighth century B.C. Amos startled the people of his day by giving a new idea of the Day of Judgment. The old idea was that the ‘Day of Jahweh’ meant the day of established good-fortune for Israel and full deliverance. That was an entire mistake, according to Amos; the Day of Jahweh would be darkness,



not light. The new conception of God necessarily involved a new conception of Providence. It was quite true, Amos held, that Jahweh had chosen them; but the choice demanded character, and if they were not good they must be punished: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities.' Robertson Smith says that the prophetic view that Jahweh would vindicate the right even by destroying his own people was alien alike to Semitic and Aryan. Here, evidently, we are upon advancing thought in Hebrew religion. And this is why I shall call Amos inspired, not because his conception is adequate for us to-day, for it certainly is not, as we shall see, but because he was *moving upwards*. Everything that tends upwards is inspired; every man who helps us at all in the right direction is inspired. Inspiration is *the impulse of the onward way* flowing into man from God, the source of all. It has nothing to do with infallibility of word or work. It does not mean that it is adequate to the needs of the after-time; indeed, the more inspired a thing is the more sure it is to create new life and new needs, which none of its own speech can ever satisfy. The proof of inspiration in old Hebrew thought is not that it was at any point final, or good enough, but that it kept *rising* and advancing. The inspired man has been regarded as a goalkeeper; but he is the very opposite, ever engaged in extending the course, and telling you that the goal is farther on. His words have been treated as a terminus, but a terminus is a dead thing; inspired words are rather to be taken as impulses of eternal progress. Think, then, of the wonderful evolution of thought from the old conception that Providence was concerned with the good fortunes of Israel apart from character to the conception that righteousness of life was a condition of the love of God.

If it had *stopped* there it would not have been all we needed; but that it got there showed noble progress, and was itself the condition of better things to come. In Amos,

too, Providence not only makes a definite moral demand, but takes a wider range. It is still national in the sense of being specially concerned with Israel, but it assumes a more positive control of the movements of the great world-empires for Israel's sake, and once, at least, it rises to the view of the equality of some other nations with Israel. 'Are not ye as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?' That view is not maintained in Amos; it seems like a flash of light. He still regards Providence as specially interested in Israel, but in a moral way, so much so that the sinners shall be slain, and the good remnant remain for the ideal days to come. He also regarded other lands as unclean. In Deuteronomy, which is later than Amos, Jahweh is still specially Israel's God.

With this national conception of Providence goes also the national conception of morality.

The Israelite may behave towards the foreigner in a way he dare not behave to a fellow-Israelite. *E.g.*, you read in Deut. xiv. 21, 'Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself.' It would probably be diseased meat. What, then, shall be done with it? 'Thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is within thy gates, that he may eat of it, or thou mayest sell it to an alien: for thou art a people holy unto the Lord.' English law is more *inspired* than Deuteronomy at this point, for it will not allow diseased meat to be sold to anyone, and we should execrate the Englishman who gave such meat in charity to an alien. Yet the Deuteronomic law was once regarded as the law of God. In the same way usury might be exacted from a foreigner, though not from an Israelite (Deut. xxiii. 19, 20). Here are laws which no one includes in the Bible when he says it is his rule of faith and practice. Yet these old enactments were *inspired*—i.e., they were *movements towards a better life*.

Better for one nation to abstain from diseased meat than none; better abolish extortion within Israel than not at all. Establish wisdom and kindness within a given area, and, even though you deny it beyond that area, still you are doing good so far as you go, and you are making it certain, though you do not know it, that others are coming after you who will extend the dominion of the good. It is by instalments that progress comes. And the test of the inspiration of any institution or law or teaching is not, Is it final and complete? but, Is it an instalment? This national view of Providence and of morality which I have been considering was certainly that. The prophets greatly enlarged the view, but you find it surviving in considerable strength in the time of Jesus; the kingdom *for Israel* was still the expectation of many. You know how far removed from that was the highest conception of Jesus, in such teaching, *e.g.*, as that God caused His rain to fall on the just and the unjust, and was kind even to the unthankful and the evil. With this wider view of the care of Providence came a wider conception of moral duty; the neighbour to love was no longer a member of the same nation, but anyone who needed help; and even enemies must be prayed for, and persecutors blessed. In the *highest* teaching of Jesus, Providence is completely emancipated from nationalism, and its concern is universal.

Now we must go back to look at our subject in another aspect—the way in which Providence dispenses rewards and punishments. In the old view we find that rewards and punishments are *external*, and dispensed on the *national* scale. The sinner may be an individual, such as Achan, but the whole host of Israel suffers defeat before the men of Ai, though they are quite innocent. The nation was the unit, and must be punished, because one member had violated the law of *taboo*—touched and appropriated the untouchable. When the people came to deal with the offender they were obliged to take a smaller unit; but the

individual sinner would not do—the whole family must be put to death. Men were not regarded as individuals, but as members of the social body. This was why it was regarded as right in 2 Sam. xxi. to put to death two sons of Saul, and five grandsons, for a sin which Saul was believed to have committed. The men themselves were innocent, but Jahweh could only be pacified by seeing them hanged. ‘After that God was entreated for the land.’ Sentence executed upon the innocent family of the offender pleased God! The individual had not yet been properly conceived.

For a similar reason it was right to kill the Amalekites, men, women, and infants, of one age because their ancestors 400 years before had offended Israel. So popular was this belief that it became a proverb: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ And it was embodied in the Decalogue that Jahweh would visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and fourth generation (Exod. xx. 5).

Providence was dealing with men, not as individuals, but on a wide scale, and also in a very *external* way. I have asked you to read Deut. xxviii. There you find the blessings and the curses with which the law of Deuteronomy was enjoined on the people. You notice that they are external. If they obey and worship Jahweh in this prescribed way, where do they find their rewards? In the city and in the field, in increased families and increased property, and victory in battle. If they disobey they are cursed in these same things, and they are taken with terrible and loathsome diseases, and reduced to such straits that mothers will even eat their own children. Have you ever tried to measure the contrast between Deut. xxviii. and Matt. v.? When you want an instructive Bible hour you could scarcely do better than read the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy side by side with the beatitudes of Jesus. The

former are material, the latter spiritual ; the former outward, the latter inward. But I am anticipating.

It was part, also, of the old view that *all* external calamity, that *all* suffering was punishment—the punishment of some sin. In 2 Sam. xxi., *e.g.*, a famine is taken to be a direct infliction for some transgression. David, with this idea in his mind, tries to think it out ; in Bible phrase, ‘He sought the face of the Lord.’ ‘And the Lord said: It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites’—*i.e.*, David came to this conclusion, or the writer of the story represents it so. Here is the idea—whether it be David’s or the writer’s does not matter—that Jahweh sent a famine in David’s day because Saul had done wrong. Every calamity was the punishment of some sin, and therefore the cause must be found somewhere. This view persisted down through Bible times, and it persists even yet. But I want you to note a great change which it underwent in the hands of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah prophesied before and during the Babylonian captivity, and Ezekiel was among the exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah, at the approach of Nebuchadnezzar, counselled Judah to surrender. This was heresy. It was contrary to the action Isaiah had taken a century before ; it was against the advice of priests and prophets of his own time, who advised Zedekiah to fight and trust Jahweh to deliver him ; and it was considered most unpatriotic, but Jeremiah believed that this captivity must come upon the people for their sins, and the sins of their fathers. Jer. xxviii. shows how acute the struggle was, where one prophet insisted upon one course, and another on another.

There is no doubt that Jeremiah’s first doctrine of Providence was that of Deuteronomy. National adversity was national punishment. You will find it expounded in chapters xiv. and xv. A terrible drought is the result of the people’s sin, and so are the ravages of war. Jeremiah intercedes for them, but Jahweh says : ‘ Though Moses and

Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight' (xv.). He says he will appoint the sword to slay them, and dogs to tear them, fowls and beasts to devour and destroy. Jeremiah does not see that the sins of those then living were bad enough to draw down all this punishment, so he goes back to the sin of Manasseh for part of the cause.

Pass now to the time when Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the few Jews that were left in Judah had taken flight to Egypt, Jeremiah among them, much against his will. In Egypt the Jews fall into idolatry. Jeremiah rebukes them, and says it is for idolatry their trouble has come upon them. But how do they answer him? By the contrary assertion. Their conception of Providence is the same with his, but they have come to a different conclusion as to the cause of their troubles. It was when they *did* worship the Queen of Heaven they were prosperous, they said, and it was since *Deuteronomy* was put in force, since Josiah's reformation, their calamities had come; Deut. xxviii. had not come true!

And Jeremiah himself had difficulties with the old conception. One difficulty was that Josiah, the exemplary king, who did right in the sight of Jahweh, the very man who put *Deuteronomy* in force, was himself killed in battle, and the reformation failed to turn away the fierceness of Jahweh's wrath (2 Kings xxiii. 26). Instead of getting all the blessings which *Deuteronomy* promised, Josiah lost his life, and the national calamity was great; it was a terrible blow to the old conception.

The thinking out of this problem brought Jeremiah the vision of a new time when things would be different. In that time men would have the law of God written in their heart, and the individual who should commit the sin would have the suffering to bear. 'In those days, they shall no more say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jer. xxxi. 29, 30). But "everyone shall die for his own iniquity; every man that

eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”” Jeremiah found that the old theory did not square with the facts, and he threw it over. There some of the Old Testament prophets were far more sensible than many who worship them. They knew nothing of an inspiration that was a bar to progressive thinking.

In Ezek. xviii. you have a very full enunciation of this new doctrine. It might be called the charter of the individual. Man is not to be included in the fate of the nation, or of his ancestors; he is free to strike a path for himself. The son of a good father is free to be wicked, and if he be, he must accept the result of it. His father's goodness cannot be between him and death; the son of a wicked father may be good, and if he be, he shall not suffer death through his father's sin. Ezekiel would not subscribe to Paul's doctrine 'In Adam we all die,' and he would have denounced a theology which condemned the race for Adam's sin. Further, man is not doomed on the one hand, nor is his salvation guaranteed on the other, by his own previous life. The good man, if he depart from goodness, may bring upon himself the death penalty, and the wicked man, if he leave his sin, shall live. Providence here deals directly with the individual. In the Decalogue, God is said to announce that He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation; in Ezekiel, God says He will do no such thing, but deal with each man according to his own merits. This doctrine, however, had its difficulties when it faced the facts of life. The case of Josiah could not be explained by it; nor would Jeremiah's own personal experience fit this theory. His whole endeavour was to do good, and he was cruelly persecuted for it. Here, then, was a case of suffering, not for wickedness, but for goodness! Jeremiah almost quarrels with Jahweh's forbearance towards his enemies—'Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?' (xv. 18). 'Take me not away in thy longsuffering; know that for *thy* sake I suffer re-

proach' (xv. 15). Here he finds in his own experience a case of suffering for goodness. Ps. lxxiii. struggles with the problem that the wicked man prospers and the righteous suffers. Surely washed hands and innocence are vain things. The only solution the Psalmist offers is that things will be adjusted in the end; these prosperous wicked men are on slippery places, and shall one day be cast down to destruction. The problem of Job is: Why does the righteous suffer? The author has no solution. He puts the theory of Ezekiel into the mouth of Job's friends, and they try to make out that Job's sin accounts for the calamities. But they preach to him so much about his sin that he feels quite righteous, and thinks *they* are sinners for preaching such sermons. The author of Job is evidently not satisfied with any theory, and he leaves the problem unsolved, sure only of one thing—viz., that the proper attitude for man is to be humble in the presence of the problem. Jahweh speaks out of the whirlwind, and Job is in dust and ashes. 'Providence is a great mystery,' he seems to say, 'bow yourselves before it.' Someone, who took up the book at a later time, thought that was poor comfort, and he wrote an appendix, in which he describes Job coming back to greater riches than ever. He would not let the idea go forth that Providence could let the good man suffer in this way to the *end*, nor suffer in this way at all without compensation in kind. Now, neither the new doctrine of Ezekiel nor the old doctrine of the national unit is a large enough truth, and we are to-day in possession of a more adequate conception than either. We must stand for the reality of the individual, and allow no conception of his relations to obscure the fact that he is a person, with a will, with sufficient moral freedom to create personal responsibility. We believe that neither heredity, nor environment, nor his own past is a final sentence of doom on any man; we hold that the door is open for the most unfortunate and for the worst into the kingdom of the blest. But it is also true that man is not an independent



unit, and that his life cannot be explained by itself : there are joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains, abilities and dispositions in it to which other lives have contributed, and are contributing. There is a solidarity, not only of the nation, but of mankind, through which the innocent *do* suffer for the guilty, and one generation for another. Heredity and environment, though they are not all, are tremendous factors always to be counted with. It is profoundly true that the sins of all are laid upon every one, and that every good man who lives and dies does so for all the world. I believe it was this truth that was struggling for utterance through the older conceptions of the Decalogue and Jeremiah.

Now I pass to Isa. liii., where you get a conception different from the two I have been considering. I do not enter now upon the difficult question as to who is meant by the Servant of Jahweh. The point for us here is that the Servant was *good*, and that he *suffered*. Here is a fact that cannot be explained by Ezekiel's doctrine of every man upon his own merits. The Servant is good : does he, then, suffer merely as punishment for the sins of others, according to the older doctrine ? This prophet rises above the idea of suffering as punishment to think of it as *remedial* and redemptive. The good Servant suffers for the sins of others, but in order to make them righteous ! Suffering here is vicarious, and creates character ; the good suffer for the bad to redeem the bad, so in the pains of innocent suffering Providence is showing a care for the world. I need scarcely point out the profound truth and lofty elevation of that conception. This is, perhaps, the highest peak in the Old Testament revelation. This, too, is the highest view of the suffering of the good in the New Testament. Jesus probably regarded His own suffering in this light, and it came to be the view of others concerning Him, that He died the Just for the unjust to bring us to God—suffered not to satisfy God's appetite for punishment, but to redeem the sinner from sin, and win him to goodness. Verily the light of God

shines on it. It is well to see that God gave men such visions of truth to transcend the common sight. It is true that the theory of external rewards and punishments persisted, that calamity and misfortune continued to be read as *direct* judgments and signs of sin, and that external wealth and prosperity were looked upon as signs of Divine favour. There were sceptics who denied it, as in Eccles. viii. 14, etc. 'There be righteous men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked ; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.' The old theory will not do. You find the old theory in many psalms, but it is impossible to read some of them without feeling that at times, at least, men rose above the general notion.

The singer of Ps. li. (leaving out the last two verses, probably added by another), which is perhaps the most marvellous of all psalms, did not ask for outward blessing, for rich lands or a prosperous city ; he only asked to be made what God wanted him to be—true in the inward parts, clean in heart, and right in spirit, so that he might diligently serve God and men. In this psalm it is not the externally rich man whom Providence favours most ; the greatest favour of God here is the gift of inward goodness itself. Here again the Old Testament touches the highest points of New Testament revelation. The old theory of outward rewards and punishments survived in the New Testament. There is a curious relic of it in Paul, when he regards some deaths in the Corinthian Church as punishments for misbehaviour at the Lord's Supper. The story of Ananias and Sapphira and many others illustrate the same point. You also meet with the idea of the *postponement* of rewards and punishments to the future age, in the New Testament. But that will come up for treatment in my next lecture. Spite of what I have said, no one can doubt that there is a vast difference between the conception of Providence which *prevails* in the New Testament, and that

which *prevails* in the Old Testament. So great is it that the saying is quite justified : ‘ The blessing of the Old Testament is prosperity ; the blessing of the New Testament is adversity.’ An old psalmist had said that he had ‘ never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread ’ ; but the New Testament sees the most righteous of all not only without a place to lay His head, and often dependent on charity, but at last hanging on the Cross, and crying : ‘ My God ! my God ! Why hast Thou forsaken Me ?’ And no deliverance was granted back into this life. Yet this same New Testament regards that assertion as only apparent, and rears the great faith that that Person, who was not rich but poor, not successful in the world but a failure, crowned only with thorns, was the great Son of God, and the Saviour of men. Calvary, with its cross of shame, becomes the mount of our highest ascensions, and the altar of our best thanksgiving. Instead of looking upon a calamity as a sign of Divine wrath, Paul glories in tribulation, rejoices with a chain upon his wrist, spends and is spent, ‘ his joy to do the Master’s will,’ and he finds the reward in the doing. Whatever may be God’s method of adjusting character to circumstances, let us be quite sure at present that what the world calls success is not the proof of God’s favour, as we are so often told in the Old Testament, and whatever may or may not be true of external rewards or punishments, certain it is that the greatest reward of goodness is goodness, and the severest penalty of sin is sinfulness. When I ask the young to pledge themselves to high standards of goodness, to take the vow of conscience, I cannot guarantee them worldly success for such devotion. Whether or not they will ‘ get on ’ depends much on the kind of society in which they live. Success only demands average morality. If a man falls below that he is put in prison ; if he rises much above it he may be driven to the Cross. We cannot promise blessing in the basket and in the store for devotion to Christ ; for devotion to Christ you

*may* be rewarded as Christ was, with derision, and persecution, and death. Even then you secure the one eternal success—the success of the soul itself. Is there a legitimate demand for more than this? I believe there is. Read at its depths, perhaps the persistent expectation of reward on the part of good men is but a demand that the world should be good enough to recognise goodness. It is true that goodness is to be its own reward, but if the individual good man suffers unjustly, we demand the adjustment of circumstances to character, and this at bottom is only the demand that all other men shall be good, so as not to inflict unjust suffering. We cannot be content with being good ourselves; we must desire the universal victory of the good. The fact is, we are quite content with ‘the wages on going on’ ourselves; we claim that the world shall come on too. This, however, is a moral and spiritual process, and we believe God is engaged in it. We believe in a Providence which enables us to hold on to goodness in spite of adversity, but which is also at work every moment on that mighty task of God, ‘the restitution of all things.’ Purified from crude forms, there is a legitimate demand, not only for heaven in the heart, but for a heavenly world in which that heart shall be for ever at rest.

## ‘THE CONCEPTIONS OF A FUTURE LIFE IN THE BIBLE.’

**I**F a religious man of to-day, who believes that at death men are either doomed at once to eternal torture as a punishment for sin, or translated as saved men to a heaven of happiness, were to search for this belief in the Bible, one of his surprises would be that he could not find it in the Old Testament. To general Hebrew thought the only future life is life on earth; there is no heaven, and in hell there is no life in any full and proper sense. In the older thought, also, and for the most part throughout the Old Testament, this future life on earth is secured for the *nation*, not for individuals. This is the general statement; how it must be modified we shall see as we go on.

To Hebrew thought death was a descent into the Under-world, called Sheol. If you use the revised version you will find this word in the margin, where the English translation may use ‘hell’ or ‘grave.’ Pfeiderer suggests that they conceived of the other world as under this one from seeing the sun apparently going down, or from the fact that the dead body was put down in the earth. Now, the first thing to remember about this Sheol is that it was the place to which all mortals went alike, irrespective of character; it was not a place of rewards and punishments. There was a sort of existence there, but not proper life; the dead in Sheol were ‘shades’—had a kind of shadowy, unsubstantial life. There speech was a whisper or sort of echo; they had no real interest in life; they were cut off from God and men. A psalmist (Ps. lxxxviii. 10) is eager to get his

prayer answered during his lifetime, because there is no revelation from God, nor any human praise of God possible after death. 'Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the shades that are deceased arise and praise thee? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?' To die was to go into the dark and into the land of forgetfulness. Ps. vi. 5 says, 'In death there is no remembrance of thee: in Sheol, who shall give thee thanks?' Ps. xxx. 9 says, 'What profit is there in my blood when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee?' 'The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence' (Ps. cxv. 17). And into this silence the good men went as well as the bad. That is why these good men express themselves so eager to praise God while life lasts, because they know there is no chance after death. Here are parts of the teaching of the Bible which no Christian believes to be true. He may say that the *whole* Bible is infallible, but he does not believe it. The Bible itself, in other parts, has made it impossible for him to believe these parts. There is no doubt that the conception of Sheol, which I have described, was the prevailing belief. It is brought out very vividly in the Song of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 10-20). Hezekiah is sick unto death. What is death according to this song? It is a going unto Sheol, where he shall not see the Lord, nor shall he see man. According to the margin of the Revised Version he will be among 'those who have ceased to be'; he will be 'cut off from the loom'; God will 'make an end' of him. He prays to recover, so that he may praise the Lord. 'For the grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day; the father to the children shall make known Thy truth.' Here you have an Old Testament saint, of whom it is said that he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, one who was a great

religious reformer, facing death without hope! He knows that death even for him is a hopeless pit! I think we all see that the Bible itself enables us to put aside this part of the Bible as untrue, and how thankful we ought to be that we are not obliged to believe it. *Sheol is never spoken of as a place of hope*; there was no happiness in it even for the best man.

Neither was it a place of active torment for the bad. In the *general* conception it was a colourless existence in which those who had been good could not be distinguished from those who had been wicked. We must, however, notice two passages which *do* make some approach to the idea of a place of punishment, though the idea is not properly and fully reached.

One is a very remarkable funeral dirge over Egypt and her multitude, sung by Ezekiel (xxxii. 18 *et seq.*). He speaks of 'Sheol' and the 'pit.' The pit is probably regarded as the same with Sheol, or possibly as the entrance to it. Ezekiel pictures the great nations which had been a terror on the earth lying in Sheol, slain by the sword. One great grave is in the middle, perhaps for the King, and the graves for the people all round the sides. Here the whole nation is conceived as continuing some sort of existence, a *shade* existence in the Underworld. It is evident that Ezekiel does not wish to represent Sheol as a place of real life, for he constantly contrasts it with 'the land of the living.' At the same time he does represent the people in it as having some emotion. The nations in Sheol are said to 'have borne their shame'; of some it is said that their 'iniquities are upon their bones.' These statements, however, may only mean that in being themselves killed by the sword these old warriors bore their shame; the very helplessness in which they now lie is their own iniquity upon their bones. These statements do not necessarily mean that they are tormented by the memory of their past life. In verse 30 there is a different statement, which says that the princes of the north 'are ashamed'; but these words are

omitted in the Septuagint, and it is therefore doubtful whether they were in the original of Ezekiel. However, there are here two notes of indisputable emotion in Sheol. When Pharaoh goes down some of the mighty dead speak to him out of the midst of Sheol. It is implied that they know him, and, perhaps, are not sorry that at last he, too, has been broken, and it is definitely stated that Pharaoh would be 'comforted' in seeing all the other mighty nations there. This was the only 'comfort' that he could find in hell—that a good many others were there, too. You see that Ezekiel's hell is not truly a place of torment; it is a hell without any fire, very different from the hell we were taught to think of when we were young. Yet it is easy to detect in this passage the germ of the idea of a place of torment—the fire will be kindled by-and-by.

In Isa. xiv. 9-12 there is a nearer approach to it. The oppressor of Babylon goes down to Sheol, and those already there greet his entrance. 'Sheol from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the shades for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall answer and say unto thee, "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to Sheol, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst lay low the nations!"' Here undoubtedly is depicted conscious life in Sheol. Memory is active; it is not here 'the land of forgetfulness,' and there is a kind of malicious satisfaction among the shades, and they at least seek to torment the King of Babylon. Whether he felt it or not we are not told. This is the nearest approach to the conception of a place of torment in the Old Testament, and it is, as you see, still very far removed from our traditional conception of hell. It is pretty certain, too, that even



this conception came late. Scholars do not attribute the passage to Isaiah, but to the period of the Exile, or later, when the King of Babylon was a prominent object of thought to Hebrew prophets.

The general conception of Sheol, however, remains as a sort of negative existence, with no semblance of joy and no real active pain, and with no separation between good and bad. It was into this underworld all men went at death. The idea of Sheol *does* contain the idea that death was not the *absolute* end of man, though it was the end of all real purpose and effectiveness in life. This world was to be the scene of all active principles, human and Divine. God would punish the sinner, and reward the good, in this life. So the blessings and the curses all through the Pentateuch are due here; not one falls on the other side of the grave. Dying was not going to meet the Judge; living was meeting the Judge. The greatest sign of Divine favour is long life, and the greatest deliverance is not to be given over unto death. The only way in which death and Sheol were regarded as penalties and used as motives for right action was through the reminder that at death all action would cease, that in Sheol there would be no communion with men or with God.

Nor was there in the *general* conception any hope of deliverance from Sheol, any hope of resurrection. The common thought is put in such words as these: 'As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to Sheol shall come up no more' (Job vii. 9). 'There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again . . . but man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?' (Job xiv. 7-10). Death is a fact, but there is no resurrection. The gloom of this conception, however, was broken by flashes, sometimes of hope, sometimes of positive faith.

When the author of Job makes his hero ask, 'If a man die, shall he live again?' his answer is negative. No; God

changes his countenance, and sends him away. His sons come to honour in life, but the father shall not know it. But this author, while he says it is so, wishes it were not so. 'Oh that thou wouldest hide me in Sheol; that thou wouldest keep me secret until thy wrath be past; that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me.' It is in the longings of the heart and in the felt needs of life that great ideas have often been born. And here you have in the form of a desire the germ of the conception of an intermediate state, a set time, and then deliverance.

It is very unfortunate that the text of the famous passage in Job xix. 25-27, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' etc., is so uncertain. What the genuine Hebrew text here is no one feels quite certain. I am not speaking of those words, so sacred to us all, as they have become charged with Christian meaning. Like many other Old Testament words they have come to mean for us what they could not have meant to their original author, because we read them in a light which had not shone upon him. I am only concerned here with the historical meaning. In the face of an uncertain text we cannot be dogmatic about it. But probably this reading would give the meaning best, 'I know that my vindicator liveth. You'—as if Job said to his friends—'are blaming and charging me with sin; but I know that he who vindicates me is alive, and that he shall stand at last upon the dust; and after my skin hath been destroyed, yet without my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see on my side.' There is no probability that the words refer to any belief in a resurrection of the body, but contain a grand assertion that a clearer vision of God may be granted to a man after death. If this thought is really in these words, then, though the vision of God is only as the vindicator of Job, yet you have here the germ of a conception that may bring all heaven in its train—the conception, viz., of a vision of God and of right after death. Here the author of Job by a flight of faith rises above what he himself has said of

Sheol, and contradicts it. It often happens, thank God, when an earnest mind struggles hard with a problem, that in a moment of rare insight it catches the light resting on the gleaming peaks of truth far away, and takes wing for the heights.

There are other evidences in the old literature of the triumph of spiritual imagination over the gloom of common thought. There was a story that Enoch had gone to God, not to Sheol; gone up, not down; and that Elijah had passed in a whirlwind to heaven. It is quite possible that these are relics of the old primitive belief that heroes were promoted to places among the gods. But, all the same, they enshrine the thought that extraordinary character was a mightier thing than death. It is true that necromancers were believed to have the power to call back the spirits of the departed, and necromancy at one time was very common. You all remember the story of the witch of Endor. The prophets fought against this practice; they did not dispute that the thing could be done, but denounced it as wicked. Even necromancy, however, shows how the ancient mind kept interfering with the absoluteness of death.

Elisha was believed to have actually waked the dead. Apart altogether from the historicity or otherwise of the tale, it embodies the *idea* of a resurrection, *not* in an immortal body, and not to immortality, but back to temporary life in this world. Here is Divine power in the prophet interfering with the reign of death. Ezekiel's vision of the re-animation of the dry bones in the valley does not, I think, count in this discussion, as it is an allegory of national revival, not an announcement of the literal resurrection of dead individuals. Nor must we count the words of Hos. xiii. 14 as evidence: 'I will ransom them from the hand of Sheol, I will redeem them from death.' Paul quotes these words as meaning resurrection. We can use them in that sense. But Hosea was not in sight of that conception. He meant that, in spite of the terrible danger which threatened

the nation, and in spite of there being no King to save it, and that Sheol was putting forth its hand to take it, Jahweh himself would effect its deliverance. The closing words of Ps. xvi. have uncertain meaning. Wellhausen translates thus: 'Therefore glad is my heart, and my honour rejoices. My body also shall abide in peace, for Thou dost not commit me to Sheol, nor sufferest Thy faithful ones to see the pit.' According to this, it is the nation that speaks, and it is national safety in this life that is asserted. Ps. xvii. 15 he translates thus: 'I, who am righteous, shall look on Thy face, and be refreshed, at Thy awaking, with a vision of Thee.' The Psalmist is praying for the destruction of the wicked, and declares that when God awakes to do it he will be refreshed with the vision.

There is a remarkable passage in Ps. xlix. 13-20. The argument is that death is the great leveller of earthly inequalities. The rich cannot take his riches with him, nor enjoy happiness after death. However rich or popular, he must follow his fathers where there is no light, and die like the beasts that perish; his very form will decay in Sheol. 'But,' says the Psalmist, 'God will redeem my soul from the hand of Sheol, for He shall receive me.' Wellhausen translates this: 'God alone can redeem my life from the hand of Sheol when it seizes me,' and, according to him, the man who is redeemed is not yet in Sheol, and is preserved by God from it—*i.e.*, from sudden evil death. The well-known verse in Ps. lxxiii. 24, 'Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory,' reads in Wellhausen's translation: 'Thou leadest me according to Thy counsel, and takest me by the hand after Thee,' and it is a declaration as to the present life. The Psalmist's conviction is sure and strong that his life is one of communion with God, and one proof of that he finds in the fact that those who break faith are suddenly put to death, which is their destruction. The conclusion here is that there is not in all the psalms one *absolute* expression of faith either

in immortality or resurrection. And the psalms were the hymn-books of the Church. This shows that that faith, so important to us, had not then become the faith of pious people. We have now to consider one more passage—Isa. xxvi. 19: 'Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs (light), and the earth shall cast forth the shades.' Some have held that this is figurative language to denote the revival of a nation as good as dead, like that in Ezekiel's vision of dry bones. I cannot accept that opinion. The prophet's faith under the pressure of calamity sees the better day coming, and then thinks how sad it is that those who had believed in it and worked for it should not see it, and his faith refuses to be checked by the thought of death. It bursts the bonds of common opinion, and says: 'Thy dead shall live.' Here is, as I think, a declaration of a resurrection, a resurrection for Israelites only, and for a future life on earth. This belongs to a group of chapters which are not regarded as Isaiah's work, and whose date is uncertain, but which were probably written during the captivity in Babylon. The words, however, were one of those wonderful flashes of faith which do not represent any common doctrine.

There is no reason to believe that there was in Israel any doctrine of future states of happiness and misery up to the second century B.C. No doubt some minds had cast curious glances across the gulf. National immortality on earth had long been believed, but when the doctrine of individualism arose *national* immortality was not enough. The individual, once keenly conscious of himself, would wonder what was to become of him. So Job longed to be hid in Sheol for a set time, as we saw. And, no doubt, there were some who came to believe that somehow or other they would triumph over death. But there was no doctrine of it, so far as we know, before the second century B.C. This is very remarkable. Many other nations believed in immortality. There

was, *e.g.*, a definite doctrine of a double future state in ancient Egypt. Why did it not appear among the Jews earlier than it did? This may have been due to their religious optimism, their intense realization of God's presence in this life, of His control of all things; their confidence that even here justice would be done, and that they would be lifted into supremacy over all nations, prevented them from speculating about another life. But the recurrence of disappointments, the fact of inexplicable trouble, the rise of the doctrine of individualism, and possibly the influence of the thought of the nation forced them at last to believe that when the Golden Age came the old saints who had hoped for it should come back and see it.

The review of the past led the writer of Ecclesiastes straight into scepticism. 'Who knoweth,' he says (iii. 21), 'the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward?' He did not believe this, but declared that the same fate befell man and beast. If the same writer was also the author of the words which occur later in the book, 'The spirit returns unto God who gave it,' he may have been only thinking of the Greek idea of re-absorption in Deity, and not of personal life with God. Anyway, in a part of the book he flatly denies immortality. But that means that there were some who believed it. The first Jewish book we know of which distinctly declares for immortality is the Book of Wisdom, which belonged to the second century B.C. There it is said (chap. ii.) that the souls of the righteous after death were in the hands of God, that, though they seemed to die, they had in truth entered into peace, and their hope was full of immortality. God had proved them, found them worthy, and now rewarded them. You see this is quite different from the old doctrine of Sheol. And, with this changed view of the future, his view of the present is changed. The great thing now is not to live *long*, but to live *well*; in fact,

an early death may be a token of Divine favour. God may take a man away from the wicked world early because he pleases Him. To this writer all the problems of life will be solved, and all its wrongs righted, in the life beyond the grave.

To this same century belongs the Book of Daniel, and this is the only book in the Old Testament which holds a distinct formulated faith in a real existence after death, and in a resurrection from the dead. 'Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' In the Book of Wisdom there is no resurrection of the body; it is only the soul's immortality that is emphasized. In Daniel there is a resurrection, but, mark, it is a resurrection of Israelites, not of all men—Israelites good and bad, and it is to a renewed existence on this earth that they come back. If you come down well into the first century B.C., 63-45, you have a book called the Psalms of Solomon, in which immortality and resurrection are explicit and indisputable doctrines. When we come to the New Testament we find the doctrine of a future existence, in which there are rewards for goodness and punishments for badness accepted. And in this was included the doctrine of the resurrection of the bodies—at least, of believers. The Sadduces, however, denied this, but the Pharisees believed it. When we seek to discover the ideas of the New Testament concerning the future we shall soon find their variety and mixture. To set them out with any adequacy is a task which I cannot possibly attempt now. It involves a vast amount of work on the New Testament documents which must be done with great care, and by the help of the best scholarship. Let me, however, indicate some points. The first, and perhaps the most crucial, difficulty rises upon the question, What view of the future did Jesus Himself take? The answer largely depends upon how we answer another question: What did Jesus mean by the kingdom of God? You find

two conceptions attributed to Him. By one set of passages He means an external establishment which He Himself is going to set up on the earth. The kingdom is future, and He says that that generation should not pass away without seeing it. This is the old national idea of a Messianic kingdom slightly transformed; the difference is that the subjects are not Jews, but disciples of Jesus. We know that Jesus did not come back within the time mentioned, and we know that that kingdom in which the twelve Apostles were to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel was not established at all.

By another set of passages it could be shown that by the kingdom Jesus did not mean the external establishment at all, but the reign of God in the souls of men, and the fellowship of such men. He who is reported to have said that they should see the Son of man coming in His kingdom is also reported as saying: 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;' they were not to believe when men said: 'Lo, Christ is here;' or, 'Christ is there.' To men expecting the kingdom in the future, He says: 'The kingdom of God is in you,' or, 'in your midst.' Many of the parables are in line with these latter passages, and show us Jesus teaching that the kingdom of God is a Divine principle of life in man, through which God comes to reign in his soul. It comes by no catastrophe, but grows like a seed, or permeates like leaven. Now it is impossible to deny that these are very different conceptions. Could Jesus hold both? Some maintain that the more spiritual view came later than His day, under the influence of His spirit. That I cannot believe. It seems to be certain that the high spiritual view of the kingdom in the soul was the view of Jesus. Then what of the other view? Some attribute all this to the Jewish biographers; they, unable to grasp the spiritual conception of Jesus in its fulness, mixed it up with their own traditional ideas, which they also attributed to Him. I have no doubt that part of the explanation lies



here. Every historian puts some colour of his own upon the history. This was especially the case in ancient times, and that the sayings of Jesus, as reported, are more strongly Jewish than they were in fact is probable enough. But there is a third view, which I think the soundest—viz., that Jesus did give *some* expression to the traditional Jewish faith in which He grew up, but that His own contribution was the spiritual view; the kingdom was in the soul. Now the future which Jesus promised in connection with the traditional view did not come—no such kingdom was established. In connection with the other view, Jesus gave no *details* as to what the future life was to be. He made no direct addition to the *doctrine* of immortality, and He said very little about it, but he made the most overwhelming contribution of history to the *faith* in immortality. He made men feel that God was so good and man so great, and the union between them so strong, that believers in Him could not but believe in a future life. The inherent potency of the soul itself calls for eternal growth. Jesus magnified man so much that one world could not contain him. His great emphasis was on the present, but it was such a present that a future must be found for it. If it be asked what Jesus taught about the future of the wicked, that again is a question beset with difficulties. It seems to me impossible to avoid the conclusion that He did sometimes teach their destruction. At other times, He so portrayed God as to encourage the hope that sometime, somewhere in the vast wilderness of being, there should not be one lost sheep. I have no time now to analyze the Book of Revelation. If you read Ezekiel and Daniel, and the parables of Enoch, you will find its sources. A Christian writer fitted old Jewish visions into a sort of Christian framework to encourage believers in Jesus at a great political crisis, and, in the old Jewish spirit, he consigned the unbelievers to the lake of fire. The future he describes was to be a future on earth; the New Jerusalem

came down, and God dwelt with His people on the earth ; they did not go up to live with Him. The book teaches us nothing about the end of the world, and to consult it for dates of final catastrophes and information about the future state, in Mr. Baxter's fashion, is mere unhistorical fantasy.

Paul's views of the future life changed and varied a good deal. In Thessalonians he looks for the speedy Second Advent of Christ to establish His kingdom, to put an end to the present order by force, and kill all the wicked. He believed that would happen before he died ; that when it did, the believers who were dead should arise, and he and others, who would be still alive, should go up to meet the Lord in the air. This, we know, did not come to pass.

Paul rose to higher views of the future than these, but I have no time to describe them, except to quote what is, perhaps, the most inspiring vision in the New Testament—that in which he sees the last enemy of man conquered, and even Christ's kingdom is delivered up to the Universal Father, and God becomes all in all. If it be asked what is the final verdict of the New Testament on the question whether man's destiny is sealed at death, or whether there is hope after death, I can only say that no conclusive answer can be given. In most places which could be quoted, destiny is fixed at death ; a man is then either saved or lost for ever. But there may be another belief in the story of Jesus going down to Hades to preach to the spirits in prison, and there is in many passages a magnificent faith that a God of love is going to have His own way in a universal victory, which must almost mean that badness cannot be eternal, nor evil ultimate. The fact is that the New Testament does not settle the question. The men who wrote in it had different ideas ; the same man had different ideas at different times. The New Testament leaves us with the sacred burden of life on our hands ; it calls upon us to *live*—to live at our best. It does not draw out for us the detailed programme of the future, but it assures us that this is life

eternal, to know God and Jesus Christ, whom He sent. It is for us to give our present to God ; it is for God to assure our future to us. The great function of the New Testament is to inspire life upon the loftiest principles, to guarantee help from the eternal sources, to kindle within us the consciousness of the Divine presence, and to set all natural virtue aflame with a sense of God.

## ‘THE IDEA OF A DEVIL.’

ANYONE who has not given attention to the subject would probably be surprised at what he would find if he turned up the two words, ‘Satan’ and ‘The devil,’ in a good concordance, say Dr. Young’s. The surprise would be that it is in the New Testament they figure. In the Old Testament the title ‘The devil’ does not occur once, and the word in the plural, ‘devils,’ only four times. In the English Bible (Authorized Version) the word ‘Satan’ is only found in four places—in 1 Chron. xxi., in Ps. cix. 6, in Zech. iii., and in the Prologue of Job. In the Hebrew Bible the word ‘Satan’ occurs in a few passages where the English Bible reads ‘adversary,’ but there the meaning is simply an ‘opposer’—*e.g.*, the angel of the Lord stood in Balaam’s way as an adversary, as a Satan (Num. xxii. 22). The Philistines object to take David with them into battle, lest in battle he should become an adversary, a Satan (1 Sam. xxix. 4). It was best to translate the word into adversary in those places, because there is no reference there to a special being or person known as Satan. In Ps. cix. 6, also, we ought to read ‘adversary’ for the same reason, and this correction is made in the Revised Version. That leaves us with only three references to Satan in the Old Testament, and these three, I take it, are after the exile in Babylon. Zechariah is post-exilic; Chronicles is also post-exilic; the date of the Prologue of Job may be more debatable, but the point is not vital. It is a notable fact, and one whose significance we must try to understand, that the idea of a devil, *in the sense of an arch-enemy of*

*God and man, as head of a host of evil spirits*, does not appear in any Hebrew literature which we can surely date before the captivity of Babylon, nor is it well developed in any Old Testament passage even after that date.

It may be well here, perhaps, to step a little out of our path to point out that the story of the serpent in Eden tempting Eve is not at all the same with the later idea of the devil. There is no suggestion in the Genesis story that the serpent is some other being in disguise; it is merely an intelligent and talking serpent. It is a remarkable fact, too, that the incident is nowhere referred to in the Old Testament. It was a long, long time before the people began to think that the serpent was the devil in disguise; the writer of the story had no such notion. Centuries after his time, when the belief in a devil had arisen, it came to be believed that if sin had come into the world through the seductions of a serpent, that serpent must have been the devil in disguise. But this theory is not to be found at all in the Old Testament. In all their teachings about sin the prophets never refer to it, which is certainly a fact of great importance. The author of the apocryphal Book of Wisdom (second century B.C.) says: 'God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. Nevertheless, through envy of the devil came death into the world' (ii. 23, 24). This looks like an allusion to the Genesis story, though it is not quite definite. If it is an allusion, it is the earliest we know of. In the Genesis story, then, you have no idea of the Satan; but you have soon after the consciousness that something has gone wrong, that there has been opposition to God, and that is the consciousness, as we shall see, out of which the idea of a devil arose later.

It does not belong to my subject now to discuss the serpent story itself, but the difficulties which any modern mind may feel in it, when it finds intelligence and speech attributed to a serpent, vanish when the modern mind makes the acquaintance of the ancient mind. Professor

Robertson Smith says that the kinship of gods and men, in antique religion, is only one part of the larger kinship of these with the lower creation. There was no difficulty at that stage in ascribing living powers and personality to a stone, a tree, or an animal. In old Babylonian legend, beasts as well as men were formed of earth mingled with the blood of a god. In Greek stories men spring from trees or rocks, and races have a tree for a mother and a god for a father. These things, Robertson Smith says, are often explained as allegories by those who forget that primitive thought treats all nature as a kindred unity; a speaking, intelligent animal was no difficulty to that mind. We are told further that the snake is an object of superstition in all countries, and endowed with a supernatural character. Men everywhere had a peculiar horror of it; when wild beasts had been driven into the desert, the snake came creeping about the dwelling, and continued to molest men, and the snake was the last animal to be deprived of its supernatural character. When it is known that such ideas were general, the Genesis story falls into its proper place, and we see that intelligent men to-day, in order to be religious, do not need to believe that a serpent knew the mind of God and persuaded men to sin. It is a striking fact that the Persians had a very similar story. God had promised men, they believed, endless happiness if they would be good, but the devil disguised himself as a serpent and tempted them to sin.

The difference, you observe, between the Persian story and the Genesis story is that in the former the serpent is avowed to be the devil in disguise. In the thought of Israel before the exile there were, of course, ‘spirits’ and ‘evil spirits’ too. But, mark you, ‘evil’ does not there mean apostasy from God, for the evil spirits themselves were the servants of God. Thus, in Judg. ix. 23 we read that ‘God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and the men of Shechem dealt treacher-

ously with Abimelech.' Now, treachery to us is wicked; but it was not wicked then if it brought about the desired result. The spirit that made the men of Shechem treacherous was sent by God for that purpose, and it was called an *evil* spirit, not in the sense of 'bad' or 'wicked,' but in the sense of one who brought calamity from God.

Again, we read in 1 Sam. xvi. 14; 'The spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from God troubled him.' Saul suffered from mental disorder, and this calamity is regarded as the work of a spirit sent by God. The evil spirits dwell in God's presence. The fullest description of the heavenly court is in 1 Kings xxii. 18-23. Ahab and Jehoshaphat want to know whether they shall go to battle to Ramoth Gilead. Micaiah, the prophet, is consulted, and he says to Ahab: 'Hear thou the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. And the Lord said, Who shall deceive Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one said on this manner; and another said on that manner. And there came forth the spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And He (the Lord) said, Thou shalt entice him, and shalt prevail also; go forth and do so. Now, therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets; and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.' If I were now discussing the conception of God I might say that not one of us could believe in the God of this passage—the God who proposed and deliberately arranged to make a large number of prophets tell a lie in order to entice Ahab to his ruin. Those who say they believe the *whole* Bible do not consider what they say. But the point of the passage for our discussion now is that the evil spirit is a member of the

Lord’s Court, and one of His servants to execute His purpose, not the devil, the enemy of God, as conceived later. All the spirits were subordinate to Jahweh. When you come to the prophets of the eighth century B.C. you find no doctrine of a supreme evil spirit. Israel knew calamity and wrong, but insisted, nevertheless, that the empire of the world was not divided. When Isaiah says, ‘The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have caused Egypt to go astray,’ how does he account for this? Not by any idea of a devil, or tempter, but ‘the Lord hath mingled a spirit of perverseness in the midst of her.’ The prophet of the exile pleads against the notion of two ruling powers, against dualism, and expresses the climax of the faith of the period when he says: “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I am the Lord that doeth all these things’ (Isa. xlv. 7). Here, in Babylon, during the captivity, the strong monotheistic trend of Jewish faith reaches its highest utterance. Up to this time God Himself is the author of fortune and misfortune; He gives health and He sends disease.

Now, we must note the fact that soon after this there appears in Israel the figure of the *Satan*. I take Job to be post-exilic—at least, the prologue. And in the prologue Satan is a prominent figure. If, however, a pre-exilic date is claimed for Job, it would not much modify the foregoing statement, because the Satan of Job is still a member of God’s court, and appears in the company of the sons of God. His distinction among them seems to be that he is a great tourist. Each time when he is asked whence he has come he replies: ‘From going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it.’ He wants to put Job to the test, and upon presenting the case to God he receives a commission to do so. It is God who gives Job into Satan’s power, and (ii. 3) God identifies Himself as the Author of the calamities which Satan was said to have inflicted on Job. Job is still good, ‘although thou movedst Me to



destroy him without cause,' said God. This, as you see, is not at all the devil of our traditional theology; he is still a servant of God. God and Satan are working together with a perfect understanding, and Satan does nothing but what God definitely agrees that he shall do. We do feel, however, that he distrusts Job too easily, and that he is too eager to put him to the test of affliction. Here, perhaps, is the seed, though a small one, of the later conception of an arch enemy. In Zech. iii., whose date is about 520 B.C., the figure of Satan appears against Joshua, the high-priest. Joshua is the representative of the people who are home in their own land, but in evil fortune, a brand plucked from the burning; and now the Satan definitely appears as an adversary, and the Lord rebukes him. It is not said that he is a member of the heavenly court now; his only character is *adversary*, and as such God rebukes him. You see the conception has developed since Job, though the immediate withdrawal of Satan from further mention still leaves him far from the later conception.

More than two centuries after this, in 1 Chron. xxi., you find a deed attributed to Satan which, a few centuries before, had been attributed to God. David had taken a census, and that came to be regarded as a sin. According to 2 Sam. xxiv. it was God Himself in His anger who had moved David to commit this sin, and afterwards punished him for doing it; but, according to 1 Chron. xxi., it was Satan that moved David to do it. The explanation is that when the Book of Samuel was written there was no Satan. God made light and darkness, created peace and evil; but by the time Chronicles was written Satan had arrived, and the sin of David, formerly attributed to God, was transferred to him. After this, Satan does not appear in the Old Testament. So far as the Old Testament is concerned the charge-list against Satan is very light. He has put Job to the test, appeared once for a moment as the adversary of Joshua, and tempted David to take a census. Surely the

most severe tribunal would admit that this is a comparatively inactive and harmless devil.

In other Jewish literature, however, which lies between our Old Testament and New Testament, Satan assumes a much greater significance. In the Book of Wisdom, as I pointed out, he is the author of death. In the Book of Enoch he is the head of a great army of evil spirits, acting in direct and avowed antagonism to the good. In Tobit, under the name of Asmodeus, he opposes Raphael the angel. How can we account for this development of thought in Israel? How did those people who repudiated dualism come to believe in Satan, an apostate from God, with an army of wicked spirits fighting against God?

There must be significance in the fact that the belief arose after the captivity in Babylon, and was elaborately developed after the people of Israel made the acquaintance of the Persians. In old Persian religion there was a battle from the beginning between the good God and the wicked spirit. For thousands of years the wicked spirit was in the ascendant, but a great prophet was born to break his power, and ultimately to overthrow him. That is the Persian counterpart to the Christian faith, that Jesus came to undo the works of the devil. It is very interesting and encouraging also to find that in Persia, where the belief in the devil was so definite, and where the power and dominion of the devil was supposed to be so great, evil was not to be ultimately triumphant; God would conquer at last. That was the old Persian faith. Did Israel learn their Satanology from Persia? They went to Babylon without it; they had some of it soon after the exile, and developed it later. That other nations influenced the development of Jewish thought there can be no doubt. One nation cannot have intercourse with another without influencing and being influenced. Jewish Satanology, however, though probably influenced by Persian beliefs, need not be considered a Persian product. George Meredith, somewhere, says that if a man is in the

habit of regarding himself as a favourite child of Providence he will require some day to believe in a devil. He means, of course, that some things will happen to him which he cannot ascribe to a favouring of Providence. So to Israel, long accustomed to believe itself the favourite child of God, intensified trouble, persistence of disappointment, and blighted hope might well produce the idea of some great oppressor, some adversary working against them. The exile in Babylon had been a great disappointment, and made impossible the Deuteronomic regulations for worship at one sanctuary. The Jews saw their cultus fall to pieces, and the few who returned from exile saw no fulfilment of the glowing promises the prophets had made to them. Instead of returning into dominion and supremacy, and receiving the merchandize of Ethiopia and the labour of Egypt, their land, within fifty years, was a Persian province. This might well give them the sense of a great adversary acting against them. This is the sense that is reflected in the vision of Zech. iii.

Again, there is another fact to be considered. The prophets, as we have shown before, had discovered the *moral* character of God—His righteousness and purity. As this deepened its hold upon the people, and as the consciousness of sin became more acute, the notion of God as author of sin became more and more impossible. Surely there must be a devil who was the source of it all. So, I think, the idea arose, and under Persian and other influences it grew to its later proportions. It is necessary to remember, however, that Israel did not relinquish the supremacy of God. The devil was at best only partly independent, and to be at last surely subdued.

Now it is the Satanology and demonology of the Book of Enoch that we meet with in the New Testament. Here it is a kingdom of evil spirits with a chief, sometimes called by the Hebrew name Satan ; sometimes by the Greek word ‘Diabolos,’ devil or adversary ; and sometimes ‘Beelzebub.’

He can tempt to sin; he can inflict bodily disease; he is the enemy of truth; his legions enter into men, and once even into swine; he is the ‘god of this world,’ the ‘prince of the power of the air.’ He has immense power, and yet one writer thinks he is a considerable coward. ‘Resist the devil,’ he says, ‘and he will flee from you.’ The devil and his hosts are said to be sound in their theology, though they are bad in spite of it. ‘The devils believe and tremble.’ The Satan of the New Testament, like the Persian Ahriman, is the personification of all wickedness. Nor is there any hope of his salvation. For him and his angels is reserved ‘eternal fire’; he must be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. The salvation of Satan is not suggested anywhere. He is to be crushed and tormented, but nevertheless left alive, apparently for ever. God is to conquer, and yet His conquest is not complete, for Satan shall have hell to rule over. The whole universe will not be won for God. There are evil ones whom God Himself neither saves nor kills. In the Book of Revelation we have the notion that God, who is quite able to chain up Satan, *for a time* lets him loose. Of course, if we took such a notion seriously into our idea of God, our God would be no better than a man who, though quite able to control his passions, yet for a time gave them license to work what havoc they could on society, then chained them up when it suited his convenience. That would be an immoral view of God. God must be as just now as He ever will be. A God who can postpone justice is unjust. At the end, too, even when justice is done, Satan in Revelation is still alive.

It must, however, be said that, though the New Testament in many passages records these beliefs, yet there are in other passages points of view gained, and heights reached, from which a larger and brighter vision is afforded. Does it not speak of ‘the restitution of all things’? Does it not look forward to a time when Jesus shall deliver up the kingdom, and ‘God be all in all’? Will God be ‘all in all’

as long as there is a spot of hell anywhere, or a devil in existence? Listen to these magnificent words of the Epistle to the Ephesians: 'It is in accordance with the loving design which God planned from the first to carry out in Christ—the establishment of a new order when the times were ripe for it, when He would make everything, both in heaven and on earth, centre in the Christ. I say "in the Christ," by our union with whom we also became God's own possession, having from the first been marked out for this in the intention of him who, in all that happens, is executing His own fixed purpose.' I take Paul to be the writer of these words, and I take them to represent his deepest thought. In this whole letter you get Paul at his highest.

For breadth of view, for grandeur of conception, for magnificent scope of promise, for wealth of hope, for depth of insight, for a triumphant realization of power, it stands, to my mind, with Colossians, transcendent in literature. He looks upon the whole universe, and thinks of Christ, and says: 'All has been created through Him and for Him.' If all is for Christ, what of hell, what of doomed men, what even of an unredeemable devil? Paul declares that Christ is the key to the solution of the mystery of being; He is the explanation of creation. He is also the explanation of history; all time, all space, all existence take their meaning from Christ. Is there room in this kind of philosophy for a host of evil spirits doomed for ever? I take it there is not. At his highest point of view, it seems to me that to Paul evil is not an ultimate power. I believe, further, that here Paul was at one with Jesus, and that it was from a vision of Jesus he got the truth. Jesus grew up amid the traditional belief of His time that the empire of the world was divided between God and the Evil One, and that under Satan there were hosts of evil spirits working mischief in the world. The physical disease which we now treat as lunacy was regarded as possession by devils. According to

the New Testament, as it stands, Jesus shared these beliefs, and I must honestly say that I think it is impossible to resist that conclusion. I am thankful, however, for the measure of relief in this matter which historical criticism affords—I mean that allowance must be made for the fact that the accounts were written by men who had inherited these beliefs, and the *strong colour* is often due to that fact; and further that the accounts were also written years after the events, when the historic fact would have grown considerably in oral tradition.

If Jesus, then, by the operation of strong psychic and spiritual forces, and by tenderness, soothed poor, fevered lunatics who were cruelly treated by society, this, in the language and opinion of the time, would be recorded as casting out devils. This very kind of disease exists under its old name to-day. Subscriptions are being asked for now in this country for the first hospital for the insane of Syria. You will find that those now in Syria treated by medical men as insane persons show the same symptoms as the demoniacs of the new Testament, and their own countrymen regard them as possessed by devils. Many of them, we are told, are curable by kind, gentle treatment. This, I believe, is the key to many of the stories in the Gospels of the casting out of devils by Jesus. Whether He believed in demoniacal possession, and so used the language of that belief, or whether He simply used the words as an accommodation to the belief of the patient in order to help his cure, or whether the mere fact of the cure is recorded in the language of the time, it is almost impossible to tell. The certainty is this: that the gentle method of treatment, which we have only come to after so many centuries, was adopted by Him so long ago. Up to a comparatively recent time the insane in this country were regarded as possessed by devils, and treated with barbarous cruelty in consequence, and when medical science was opposing that theory it was denounced as heresy. The infallible Bible

theory required the old belief. Men asked then, as now : 'Shall we give up the Bible?' The right answer now, as then, is : 'No ; but you shall give up your false theory of the Bible, and cease to talk ignorantly about it, or else in the march of thought you will be left behind.' Now, though I do not claim that Jesus was clear of the traditional beliefs, I do most certainly think that the records are exaggerated. There is not, *e.g.*, to my mind, the slightest reason for believing the absurd story of the swine of Gadara. The old-fashioned infidel has had many a turn on that story. It was quite possible, however, for such a story to grow when you remember that the scene was placed in a heathen part of the country, and that the Jews often called the heathen swine. The belief in the Evil One, too, was probably part of the creed which Jesus inherited by His incarnation into Jewish life. But if you want to estimate an outstanding personality fairly you must, as Harnack maintains, put into the foreground, not what He shared with His contemporaries, but what was most *characteristic* of Him. What He had in common is the proper background. On this principle we must give to Jesus the *highest ranges* of the teaching found in the Gospels, for we find no one else to take His place. When we do this, I think the conclusion of Edward Caird is well taken : 'In any case it may be said that the idea of an absolute power of evil, which does not exist with a view to a greater good, is essentially opposed to the whole spirit of the teaching of Jesus, and must ultimately be set aside by the development of His thought, even if it was included in traditional conceptions of the time which He was unable to repudiate.' Now, it is this 'spirit of the teaching of Jesus' which I think Paul had at last caught when in the Ephesian letter he sees the whole universe and all history, past, present, and to come, centred in the Christ, and God 'in all that happens' fulfilling His own fixed purpose of grace and salvation.

The value of the belief in a devil is not that it is a

satisfactory explanation of sin, but that it has been man's assertion that sin does not belong to his own real self, nor does it belong to God. The belief in a devil is a witness to man's consciousness that sin is alien to the highest purposes of his own life, and also to the true end of the world-life, and is therefore to be conquered, that God and man may come to their own. It is a witness to the grandest fact in human experience—viz., the refusal of man to identify the essence of his being with sin, and his consciousness that God must be absolutely good. Now this remains when man ceases to believe in a personal devil, and believes with James that when a man is tempted he is ‘drawn away by *his own lust* and enticed.’ It is his own in the sense that he must accept responsibility for it, but it is not of his very self, because his own proper, higher life can only be realized by its conquest. Evil, in our belief, only exists to be overcome by the power of God in man. We cannot believe in two ultimate powers which will somehow divide the world between them at the finish. Just as we refuse to believe that the seat of authority in ourselves belongs to sin, so we refuse to believe that the seat of authority in the universe belongs to evil. It is God the Eternal Righteousness, God the Eternal Truth, God the Eternal Love, who reigneth over all. Whatever sin may be, we cannot believe that it belongs to the eternal order. It shall not, therefore, break our heart, or silence our song, or take away our prayer. Fall we may, but climb we must. If we fail to-day we will renew the struggle to-morrow. The speech of the angel of faith comes upon the night with prophecy of a brighter day, the day of perfect righteousness, the promised day of God.



## THE ENHANCED VALUE OF THE BIBLE THROUGH HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION.

**I**T is no doubt true that the criticism of the Bible has caused pain and distress to many good people. So did the Protestant Reformation. Many pious souls trembled as for the very ark of God, and were quite sincerely afraid that the foundations of religion would be destroyed. So did even Christianity itself. Jesus Christ was not crucified by bad men; He was crucified by the good men, who believed that all religious authority was going to pieces in His hands. In their view He came to destroy; the Law and the Temple were being undermined; the very guides of their life and the fountains of their inspiration were threatened; they drove Him to the Cross in order to save religion. How appropriate the prayer, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'!

The Jews who persecuted Paul were not bad men. They had a great care for things which had grown sacred. No doubt they sometimes did very wicked things because they were so religious—told the lie often to serve the truth; but undoubtedly it was a deep and profound concern for venerable religion that lay at the bottom of the persecution of Paul, and his pain at having the cause of progress thwarted was, perhaps, no keener than theirs at having the religion of centuries transcended. Great movements are never brought to birth without soul-travail; the age of expansion is the age of much distress; progress is always bought at the cost of suffering. The man who is on the onward march should neither delight in the pain it inflicts, nor, on the

other hand, should he stop the march to relieve the pain. Enlargement is imperious, progress divine; knowledge has an irresistible movement which can never be finally stopped for the most sacred attachments. What we may do is to pause now and then to show to those who are distressed, if they will listen, the real gain of the onward movement. The historical interpretation of the Bible often alarms good people who do not understand its principles and the immense service it is doing. And I know nothing much more despicable in reference to this subject than for a man to undertake to discuss it, and, instead of really going into it and dealing with it in a manly way, try to work upon the fears of the ignorant, create new prejudices, and inflame old ones. Biblical criticism was not an arbitrary choice. It was undertaken under compulsion—the compulsion of the law of development. For a thousand years the Roman Church had claimed the right to interpret the Bible. The Protestant Reformation broke with that authority. And once liberty was claimed for the private interpreters, then the so-called higher criticism was inevitable as soon as the machinery arrived that made it possible. The Protestant Reformer is indeed the proper father of the higher critic. Once the Reformers called in private judgment, Biblical criticism was only waiting for its apparatus of scholarship. For if we are to judge by the Bible, we must know the Bible; and that is the one aim of the Historical Interpreter—to know what the Bible says, how it came to say it, and what it means. In order to understand it, we must know how it grew. And the critic's great inquiry is, How did the Bible grow? The story which the critics have told us has certainly transformed our idea of the Bible, and changed our intellectual attitude towards it. My contention is that this change is an immense gain, and fruitful of excellent results to those who will take the trouble to understand it.

1. It has brought us to see that the Bible is a living Book. For a time criticism spent itself upon the text of Scripture,

as if the only thing necessary to understand the Bible was to find the proper text. There were various readings; the original reading must be followed if possible; anyway, that reading must be found which had most ancient authorities in its favour. This was the 'Lower Criticism,' and a very necessary piece of work it was. But it was borne in upon the mind of the student that, though the right text might be settled, the meaning of the passage might still be unsettled. And what was necessary to find the meaning? If an Englishman to-day wants even to understand Shakespeare he must not always attach the meaning to words which he would give to those same words in his own speech. Every school-child knows that there are words there which have a different meaning from what they have now. In order to find that meaning a great deal must be known about the *period* in which those pieces were written. Language is always related to the general life, and cannot be understood apart from it. In the same way the life of the time not only moulds the language, but also moulds the ideas and the sentiments of the time. So the student of the Bible found that to settle the text, though a necessary thing, was, after all, only a small fragment of what was necessary. He must also go outside the Bible for light on the Bible; he must gather all possible information concerning the national life and read every writing in the light of the period which produced it. This was called the Higher Criticism. It is simply a wider effort to understand. Its pre-supposition is that, like all literature, the Bible is the outcome of life, and life is therefore the commentary on the Bible. God did not write the Bible, but He was present in that life which the Bible records, and the Bible therefore is a revelation of God at work in humanity. There were blunders and mistakes in that life, and there are inevitably blunders and mistakes in the Bible. But there was a guiding and correcting Spirit at work among that ancient people; that guidance and correction may be plainly traced in the Bible,

and so these Scriptures become profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. This does not mean that the teachers of Israel were not inspired *from above*. Most assuredly they were. I can never understand development without Divine action. Every man who seeks to draw people forward and upward must be inspired from some source above their level; and the best men are quite aware of the Spirit greater than theirs which is in them. But this does not make their speech and action unrelated to the general life of the people, for, indeed, their only chance of success lies in the fact that the people also know something of the striving of that same Spirit! The teachers of Israel were real living men, steeped in the life of their time; their thoughts and ideas and sentiments were in vital relation to those of their time, even when ahead of them and differing from them. Inspired many of them undoubtedly were, but superhuman they were not. Now, when the Bible is thus discovered to be a vital part of human life, it becomes a living Book. It ceases to be mechanical, it is not a supernatural machine produced in some laboratory in the sky; it is a natural flower grown on earth, but only possible because the sun was shining in the sky. If upon that nation of old the Sun of Righteousness had not arisen, and if the human spirit had not drunk the Divine influences, then this Bible garden could not have been. All the same, it is a natural garden, with weeds as well as precious flowers and fruit. Now, the *full* appreciation of the Bible, as a part of human growth under Divine cultivation, is one of the beneficent results of Historical Criticism. Again I say the Reformers prepared the way for it. For what does the right of private interpretation mean? The man who claims it may not take the full scope of his principle—the Reformer certainly did not—but the real meaning of it is that the Bible must be the outcome of a life *like unto* my life. It is this likeness that makes interpretation possible. It is only when we find ourselves in the Bible that the Bible properly

finds us. If it had dropped from the sky no man could interpret it. To-day, thanks to the critics, this feeling is in full consciousness. We feel that the Bible is *ours*. Isolated it can no longer be. Set aside as an ornament, or fixed on a pedestal to be bowed to, or retained as an oracle for emergencies it shall not be; it is daily food; it is literature; it is a companion; it is alive with human interest. The Bible now can take its place in that larger revelation of God which is as wide as the world. The idea of the thirteenth century that God had given two books—Nature and the Bible; that Nature was to be studied independently, and the Bible left to be interpreted by the Church—would not work. Truth is one, and must be sought in the whole, and all must have access to the whole. The greater Bible is the whole world in all its history, and the Hebrew Scriptures are part of it. In the whole evolution of life is to be found the mind of God. The most important chapters of that wonderful story are written in the Bible, and their value is not diminished but increased, when their relation to the whole is recognised.

One of the results of this is that it was never so much studied. Our generation has seen an output of books on the Bible of which no other generation could have had the slightest conception. Think of the enormous expense of producing the 'Encyclopædia Biblica,' Hastings' 'Bible Dictionary,' and the Polychrome Bible; and yet these are deemed safe ventures for the book markets. You know what that means. It means that publishers can calculate on a sufficient public interest. Those are but a fraction of the output. Think, too, of the number of scholars who are giving all their time to Bible work. Do you suppose they are working as machines without vital interests? The fact is that the criticism, much abused by the ignorant, and sometimes made the subject of poor jokes by men who have only touched its fringes with incompetent fingers, has effected the resurrection of the Bible into modern life.

With the old theory, in the face of rising modern science, nothing could have saved the Bible from falling into disuse. It would have been put on the shelf as a discredited book. But criticism has shown it to be a well of living water, teeming with points of vital interest for man.

2. It has enabled the Bible to speak for itself. The Protestant Reformation said to the Catholic hierarchy: 'I claim the right to go to the Bible for myself.' That was a step forward. But another was needed. The Protestant often took his own system of theology to the Bible, and so the Bible's own voice was still stifled. The critic must come along and say: 'I claim the right of the Bible to speak for itself.' And never did sectarianism receive such a blow. Protestantism had divided hopelessly, and every sect claimed the Bible for itself. When the Bible is freed from dogmatic interpretation it is seen to belong to no sect; the variety of a nation's life for fifteen hundred years is in it; and in its best teachers it reaches a universalism too great for any system or sect. Upon the old theory, the Bible, being the word of God throughout, was all of equal value. Any sect could run off with a set of texts and build its own fort, from which it felt at liberty to shoot at every other sect, while every sect made the same claim to have built upon words of Scripture. When historical interpretation sets the Bible free to speak for itself it is found that one of its main features is the constant displacement of standards by higher standards in the march of progress. We are to find the will of God, not in isolated texts, but in the drift of the development portrayed; and nothing is plainer from the Bible than that God wishes us to be always growing in knowledge, in purity, and in love, and that there is no final system of doctrine nor final form of worship. Again and again the Bible shows you standards, taken as Divine, giving way, ethical and theological ideas transcended by better ones, until when you reach the highest revelation in the Bible it contains no formulated creed and no moral

code; it is just simply the religion of love to God and man, the vision of the pure in heart, and an exhaustless impulse to go for ever into more of these, 'Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' So Paul understood it. His religion should not be a religion of the letter, but a spiritual principle; no bondage from the outside, but a living, working spirit within, which would never be tied to the past, but, forgetting the things behind, press forward. When the sects will come to read their Bible in the light of criticism we shall have done with the wars of creeds, done with sectarian bigotry, done with the *odium theologicum*, done with the popes of all denominations; our artificial barriers will be broken; a text here and there will be no foundation for building separating walls; everyone will see that the New Testament was never meant to settle the *pattern* of the Church nor even the ordinances; the Baptist will not think that a commandment of Jesus makes immersion necessary; the Congregationalist will see that the Friend who does not take the Lord's Supper may be as near the Lord as he; all will know that the one great commandment is, Love God and one another. Thus the Bible, instead of being taken in fragments and dividing men, will be taken as a whole and unite them. What a tremendous gain this would be to Christendom! The Federation of the Free Churches which has already taken place would have been impossible but for the relaxation of the old view of the Bible, though that relaxation is often unacknowledged and even unconscious. Thousands who still think they hold the old views have ceased to emphasize them. The good Spirit of the age extracts this practical concession from them; and but for this, union would have been as impossible as in the old time.

Again, we gain immensely in the *ethical* sphere, through the breakdown of the old theory, by letting the Bible speak for itself. By giving authority equally to all parts, the old theory made the Bible a very dangerous book.

I have no time to illustrate, but one illustration is unavoidable. Have we not heard of Christian pulpits justifying the war in South Africa from the wars of the Old Testament? This is the sort of atrocity which the old view of the Bible made possible. The old theory allowed you to take a verse from the Old Testament, and go out and shoot your enemy on the strength of it; the new theory asks you to find the will of God, not in the hewing of Agag, but in that ascent of life from the barbarism of Samuel to the prayer of Jesus on the Cross. Watch that line rising, ever rising, leaving the ape and the tiger behind, until the man stands on the heights of manhood in love and compassion and prayer, and then say: 'That is God's will; that is God's will in the Bible; that is the way He wants the world to go; that is the way I must help it to go.' As a moral guide, the Bible on the old theory was most dangerous. It proved a source of cruelty again and again; it burned thousands of witches upon Divine authority; it has given nations a pretext for barbarity; it has made many a wicked King think he had a Divine right to his throne; it inflicted indescribable suffering on poor lunatics through giving authority for the belief that they were possessed by demons.

The Bible is not responsible for these horrors, but the old view of the Bible is. Upon the new interpretation, the Bible, instead of being dangerous, becomes the most fruitful source of moral inspiration. The highest morality the world has seen is found in the Bible, and the Bible itself, on its highest levels, is the severest condemnation of all that is lower, in its own pages. Nothing can be more inspiring than the vision of triumphant morality in Jesus. Let the Bible speak for itself, and it will tell you that life must for *ever* be an up-line—from bad to good, from good to better, ever on towards the best.

3. Again, by letting the Bible speak for itself, it gains immensely as a *comforter*. One of the chief values of the



Bible has always been its power to comfort, and here many people are afraid lest criticism should destroy it. I think it greatly increases its use. I see no element of real comfort lost, but much gained. Take a verse where the word itself occurs: 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God.' If the old theory is right, that was spoken by Isaiah a hundred and fifty years before it was wanted. Just think of a man writing down by miraculous foreknowledge a prescription for comfort a hundred and fifty years before the need for it arose. How much comfort do we ever get from men who have known nothing of our sorrows? How mechanical all that is, even if you could believe it to begin with! It makes it almost worthless, even if it were true. But take the other theory. Historical criticism tells you that Isaiah did not write those words. They were written by some prophet who was himself *in captivity*. In the very heart of the trouble here is a man who found the comfort of God, and is able, therefore, to comfort his fellows; it is a declaration to all the world for ever that God may be found in the fire, that the allegory of Daniel and the three youths is true. Instead of being words from the outside of trouble, given by some miracle to the writer, and of no use for a hundred and fifty years,\* they come from the inside, spring from the human heart that has found God, and are therefore an assurance that every stricken child may find the Father near. When the best things in the Bible are thought of as written things let down from heaven, or dictated from the sky, they are not in touch with life; but when we realize that these things were the outcome of actual human experience, then a thousand hopes light up all around us, for we, too, are men, and may experience the same things. If I thought that some supernatural aid was given to Paul to write his letters, which cannot be given to me, then I could only say that he was too far away from me to be any real help; he is in the clouds and I am on the earth. But if I find that Paul

struggled with passions and prejudices and weakness and opposition and imperfect knowledge just as we do, and yet rose to such heights of victory, I see up along the mountain of moral obligation a shining track of possibility for me; and, though the rocks are there and the precipices; though there will be storms and mountain torrents; still, since Paul said, 'In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us,' I may, too. The Power which availed for him will avail for me, and I can link my feebleness to it as he did. The heroes of the Bible had no help either to live or to write, except by natural endowments, which you may not have. And so, what they were, and what they said, is a source of constant inspiration to deeper and diviner life. Let us see to it that we are never content with any mere historical knowledge of the Bible. The Lower Criticism concerned the text; the Higher Criticism found the historic interpretation; but there is a highest, and that is *the meaning which a kindred experience finds*. Knowledge of facts is never all we need; experience of forces and powers we must also have. We must know the Bible in the sense of finding for ourselves the Power it reveals for lifting life, and cleansing from sin, and opening for us the gates of God's eternal day. 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.'

THE END



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LARGE CROWN 8VO., CLOTH

PRICE 3/6

# THE EVANGEL OF THE NEW THEOLOGY

Discourses upon Modern Ideas  
in Theology

BY

THE REV. T. RHONDDA WILLIAMS

*The Yorkshire Daily Observer* says :

‘ Full of sound and well-garnered grain.’

LONDON

PERCY LUND, HUMPHRIES & COMPANY, LTD.

3 AMEN CORNER

# LIST OF SIXPENNY EDITIONS IN PAPER COVERS

## HISTORIC VIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY PROF. PERCY GARDNER, LITT.D.

'Dr. Percy Gardner's earlier and larger work, "Exploratio Evangelica," is now so generally reckoned by liberal theologians in this country as the most important English publication of its class that has appeared since "Ecce Homo," that a new work from the same hand is bound to attract attention. Nor will purchasers of this book be disappointed. . . . The lectures deserve to be widely read, as being thoughtful, scholarly, and illuminating.'—*Westminster Gazette*.

## THE CONFESSION OF FAITH OF A MAN OF SCIENCE

BY PROF. ERNST HAECKEL

'We may readily admit that Professor Haeckel has stated his case with the clearness and courage which we should expect of him, and that his lecture may be regarded as a fair and authoritative statement of the views now held by a large number of scientifically educated people.'—*Times*.

## NATIONAL LIFE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF SCIENCE

BY KARL PEARSON, F.R.S.

PROFESSOR OF APPLIED MATHEMATICS, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON

'The essay is a plea for patriotism upon scientific lines, and ought to be read by every intelligent citizen, and especially by all educationalists.'—*British Weekly*.

## PLEA FOR A SIMPLER LIFE

BY GEORGE S. KEITH, M.D., F.R.C.P.E.

'It is the old exhortation—plain living and high thinking. But it is more: it shows the way to reach it. It is indeed a most earnest yet scientific exposition of the evil we do to our bodies and souls and spirits by mixed dishes and medicines. If we would follow Dr. Keith's advice and take his prescriptions, we should have less dyspepsia and less atheism amongst us, less need for doctors of medicine and less need for doctors of divinity.'—*Expository Times*.

## FADS OF AN OLD PHYSICIAN

BY GEORGE S. KEITH, M.D., F.R.C.P.E.

'Dr. Keith's fads bear a remarkable resemblance to common sense, and the book throughout is eminently readable and interesting as well as instructive.'—*Scotsman*.

PUBLISHED BY  
ADAM & CHARLES BLACK, SOHO SQUARE, LONDON, W.







50 707 347

518422





